The Holiday Issue

bon appétit

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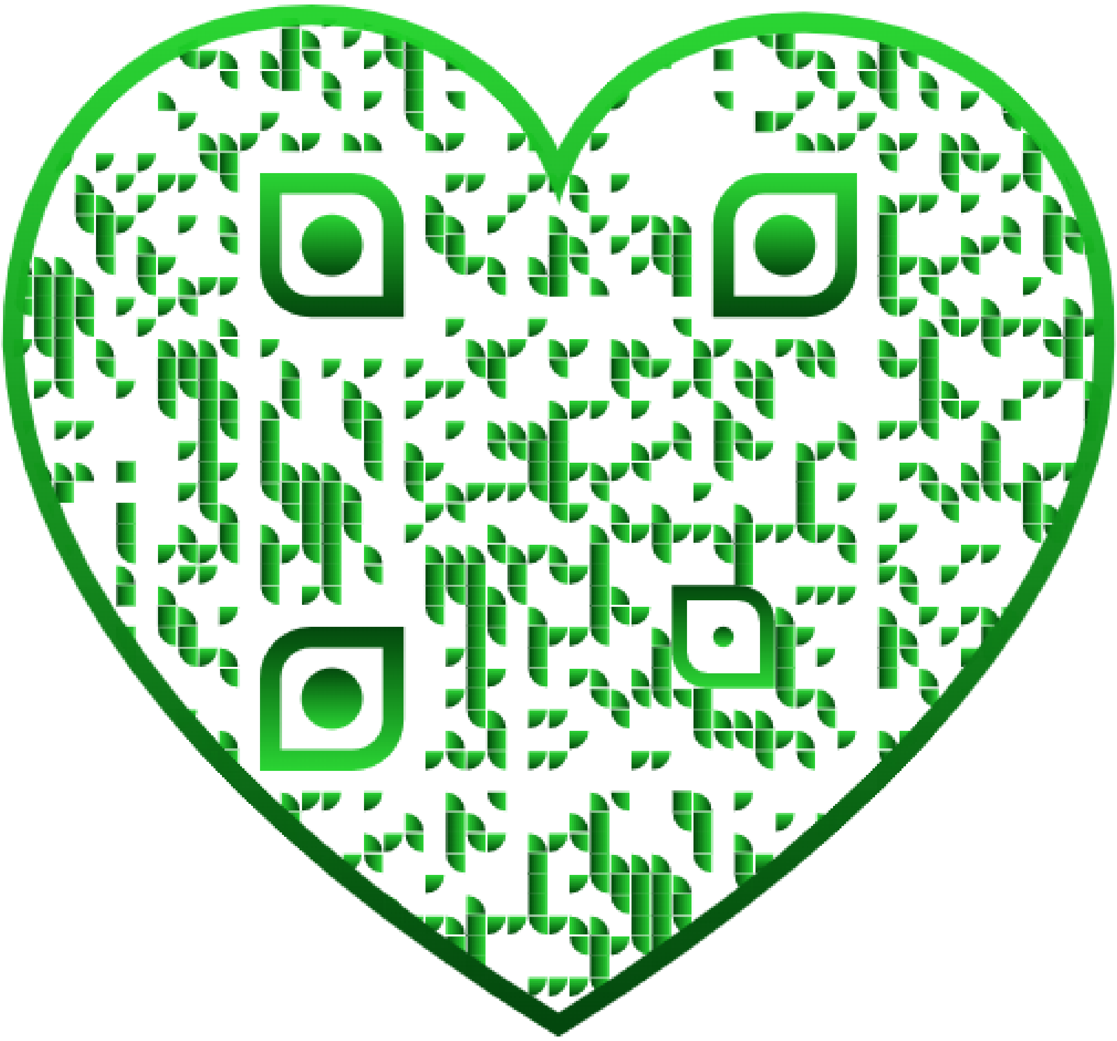

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December / January

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The Yule log gets reinvented, including this bejeweled take featuring sugared fruit. P. 34

PHOTOGRAPH BY BOBBY DOHERTY.
FOOD STYLING BY MICHELLE GATTON. PROP STYLING BY ANDREA BONIN.

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At Honō Izakaya, cocktails are a masterful blend of Japanese and Quebec flavors. P. 16

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From the Editor

Editor in chief Jamila Robinson shares what's on her mind this month

Another great holiday gift? The wintry white wines on page 90.

I was having lunch with a friend recently where we were bonding over our love of giving homemade preserves during the holidays. "It's something everyone can appreciate," the friend said, adding that a jar of apricot spread or a pot of fig jam from a late-summer harvest is a simple and personal gift.

I find the sentiment that food brings us together especially true of holiday food gifts when the creativity that takes place in the kitchen becomes the building blocks that make memories, create traditions, and fuel our connection to others.

Rolling and wrapping caramels to drop into a sleeve. Decorating sugar cookies, then leaving them out for Santa. Slicing a pie after a holiday dinner. I know several people from Puerto Rico who spend a good part of the season bottling coquito to share with friends and coworkers, as well as folks who ship tins of homemade holiday cookies near and far.

In fact, most food gifts can transcend socioeconomic boundaries, age, and culture and serve as little acts of diplomacy. Cherry preserves from Washington, spice blends from the Carolinas, or honey from California are whispers of home that help us express our region's culture, history, and ethnicities. Gifts like cookbooks, bottles of wine, air fryers, and popcorn makers encourage action—ultimately to create something delicious to share.

Last year former US surgeon general Vivek Murthy visited the Bon Appétit Test Kitchen and discussed his booklet, "Recipes for Connection." Gathering, he said, is a cure for the loneliness epidemic and a pathway to better understanding. He encouraged us to invite people over to share a meal. It doesn't have to be fancy. "The cornerstone has always been being together and making food together," he said. It could even be a few batches of cookies or some preserves that everyone takes home as a gift.

Make Something | Host Something

HOST A BA-STYLE COOKIE SWAP
The Bon Appétit Test Kitchen editors are repping their hometowns with new cookie recipes (p. 52). Set up a cookie swap with your favorite cookies, using flavors that represent your city. Buy a stack of cookie tins or boxes from a craft store so everyone can customize their dozen.

COOKBOOK POTLUCK
Some of the cookbooks our Test Kitchen editors chose as their favorites of 2025 changed the way they cook at home (p. 74). Now it's your turn to share what changed how you cooked this year. Host a potluck and have friends make a dish from their favorite cookbook. You can swap books and recipes at the end.

WINTER WHITE (WINE) PARTY
Whether it's to accompany a buffet of lamb and root vegetables or a white elephant gift, the slate of complex, velvety white wines (p. 90) are well-suited for a sit-down dinner, to be sipped with raclette or fondue, or alongside a bowl of buttery popcorn.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUZANNE SAROFF. FOOD STYLING BY MAGGIE RUGGIERO. PROP STYLING BY LINDEN ELSTRAN.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR. (PORTRAIT)

Buttery Fontina
Savory Artigiano
Fresh Mozzarella
SHARE THE JOY!
Nutty Parmesan
Smoked Scamorzarella

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TEST KITCHEN
TIPS, RECIPES, *and*
RECOMMENDATIONS

Table Talk

RESTAURANTS,
TRAVEL, *and* FOOD
FOR THOUGHT

Warm pouding chômeur at Buffet de l'Antiquaire P.16

TASTE OF THE TOWN: QUEBEC'S BEST MAPLE DISHES

Also, a simple-as-can-be chocolate mug cake, buttery shrimp scampi bisque for a crowd, and bûches de Noël as you've never seen them before.

Maple Syrup Symphony

Maple in its many delightful forms is essential to Quebec City's history. Local writer **Pamela MacNaughtan** shares eight restaurants celebrating syrup's story.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR.

I bet you can envision the scene even if you've never been to Quebec: bearded men in black-and-red checkered shirts, snowy maple sugar bushes, tapered tin buckets filled with sweet sap. Maple syrup is as representative of the province as the fleur-de-lis. Historians believe 16th-century European explorers learned from the First Nations and Indigenous peoples how to use maple sap to survive Quebec's harsh winter conditions. Indigenous communities had long made medicine with maple sap and bark and used maple sugar and sap to cook venison, cure meats, and, of course, make maple syrup.

Over 400 years later maple syrup is a billion-dollar global industry, and Quebec is home to the world's first maple reserve, holding up to 218,000 barrels of maple syrup. It's produced in spring, when the weather starts to warm up and the maple trees produce more sap. The maple syrup at the beginning of the season is light, golden, and delicate, best enjoyed with yogurt or drizzled on ice cream. Mid-season syrup is amber and rich and goes well with most everything. Late-season syrup is dark, with a concentrated flavor that works well in baking, sauces, and glazes. Quebec's chefs make the most of this dazzling ingredient at every point in its season.

In the modern kitchens of Quebec City, chefs weave maple into dishes as a natural sweetener and use it to cure salmon, glaze ducks, and add body to vinaigrettes. Maple salt adds a sweet-savory punch to rubs and stews, and maple sugar is used to give cocktails a smooth and tantalizing finish. These eight restaurants celebrate the history, ingenuity, and thriftiness that maple represents in our city.

Chez Boulay's tartine is topped with maple-scented mushrooms.

AUX ANCIENS CANADIENS

34, rue Saint-Louis

Maison Jacquet is a small white house with a gabled apple red metal roof in the heart of Old Quebec. It dates back to 1675, making it one of the oldest surviving houses in the city. Aux Anciens Canadiens opened in 1966 and quickly established itself as an iconic staple for refined Quebecois cuisine. It's a fine dining experience without pomp or circumstance, a stark contrast to the boisterous atmosphere of La Bûche down the street (below). The tarte au sirop d'érable et crème barattée is a favorite among locals and tourists alike. The silky-rich pie is made with maple syrup, butter, heavy cream, and eggs nestled in shortcrust pastry and served with a dollop of Chantilly cream. Lunch or midafternoon is the best time to dine, when most people are busy exploring the surrounding historic neighborhoods.

LA BÛCHE

49, rue Saint-Louis

This urban sugar shack took Quebec City by storm when it opened on rue Saint-Louis in 2015. Its stone walls are decorated with mounted animal heads and fur pelts, and tables are laden with red-and-white gingham napkins and old maple syrup cans filled with condiment packets. Yanick Parent, Guillaume Cartigny, and Mychael Blouin are the masterminds behind the quaint restaurant, creating a boisterous menu of traditional Quebecois foods—usually with a gluttonous upgrade. The Tartare de Cerf is a velvety dish of deer tartare made with black garlic, bacon dressing, and caramelized walnuts; the peppery flavor of fresh savory, a popular herb in Quebec cuisine, balances the sweetness of the maple butter lightly coating each bite. Dining family-style is an ideal way to approach the menu at La Bûche, and a plat principal will be plenty for you and a friend.

Aux Anciens Canadiens
NICOLAS

A traditional Quebecois Christmastime combination at Aux Ancienes.

DINER SAINT-SAUVEUR

450, rue Saint-Vallier Ouest

Nestled in a quiet corner of the Saint-Sô neighborhood, Diner Saint-Sauveur is a buzzy, eclectic restaurant with pink and mint green accents, a couple of '50s-style diner booths complete with chrome-rimmed tables, bar seating for eight, and an open kitchen. This local hot spot is known for its hearty comfort food creations, a marriage between Quebecois and American classics. Think macaroni and cheese with fried brussels sprouts in Buffalo sauce, and juicy cheeseburgers with mushrooms and garlic aioli. The chicken and waffles are rightly adored. Chicken breasts are soaked in buttermilk for 48 hours before they're breaded and fried until crunchy on the outside and tender on the inside. The chicken is served on a fluffy deep-fried waffle and drizzled with a heady mixture of maple syrup and sambal oelek.

RESTAURANT SAGAMITÉ (OLD QUEBEC)

68½, rue Saint-Louis

When Niva Sioui and Steeve Wadohandik Gros-Louis opened Restaurant Sagamité in Wendake in 1999, it quickly became a destination restaurant. The Indigenous-owned restaurant is dedicated to sharing the culture, art, and culinary heritage of the Huron-Wendat Nation. Its Old Quebec location opened in the summer of 2019, a small space with intricately carved totem poles just inside the entrance, a birch bark canoe light feature on the ceiling, and paintings and hand-carved wood panels decorating the walls. The menu is comprised of wild elk, bison, and venison, along with salmon and local seafood, all complemented with root vegetables and fresh greens. Plump seared scallops are topped with fresh strawberry and

At The Buffet de l'Antiquaire, diners can add maple syrup to any dish.

Maple butter is a welcome addition to La Bûche's deer tartare.

surrounded by swirls of luscious maple syrup and crumbles of wild boar bacon—a succulent, deceptively complex entrée.

LE CHIC SHACK

15, rue du Fort

A decade ago the hit Canadian food and travel show *You Gotta Eat Here!* catapulted Le Chic Shack into the culinary spotlight; the lines to get in, particularly in summer, rarely die down. It's a go-to spot for toothsome poutines made with crisp potatoes, deep-fried and slightly smashed before they're topped with fresh squeaky cheese curds and a homemade gravy. Deliciously messy burgers like Le Robuste (venison patty, maple whisky deglazed mushrooms, Ciel de Charlevoix cheese, and black garlic mayonnaise) and Le Shack (beef patty, Cantonnier cheese, tender red-ale-braised beef, and a punchy hit of horseradish aioli) round out the menu, complementing the equally creative poutines. The Sugar Shack is one of the most popular, topped with a maple whisky gravy and handfuls of maple-glazed bacon. Share the poutine and you'll have room for a boozy milkshake, which, of course, features maple caramel.

CHEZ BOULAY

1110, rue Saint-Jean

It was in 2010 on *Les Chefs!*, Quebec's answer to *MasterChef*, that chef Arnaud Marchand met Quebec culinary icon, food competition judge, and owner of Restaurant Le Saint-Amour, Jean-Luc Boulay. Two years later they teamed up to open Chez Boulay, a restaurant where French techniques and boreal flavors collide, creating a Nordic experience unique to Quebec. Think arctic char, wild game, foraged mushrooms, Labrador tea (a plant found in Quebec, used in Indigenous and Nordic cooking), and maple syrup. Weekend brunch is a particularly popular affair, with a menu of rich, ancestral foods like seared trout, crusted with a thin slice of bread cooked in butter until golden brown, and La Récolte, a mushroom tartine with Père Canuel smoked tempeh, poached egg, and a shallot foam with a maple-scented milk cap. It's a delicate balance between bougie and comforting.

SAVOR THE SYRUP

Four maple-based souvenirs to bring the sweetness home.

Maple Syrup
Small-batch artisanal bottles and cans last longer than syrup sold in plastic jugs. Available in gift shops and grocery stores throughout the city.

Km12 Maple
A dry maple gin made by Distillerie du Fjord with foraged ingredients from Quebec's boreal forest and sold in SAQ, our government-owned liquor store.

Sortilège
Maple whisky adds a touch of sweetness to coffee; poured over ice cream or waffles, it brings a nice oomph.

Maple-smoked salt
A blend of maple sap, smoked sea salt, roasted garlic, and onion powder, made by local producer Kanel and sold at La Place Boutique Gourmande in Saint-Roch.

BUFFET DE L'ANTIQUAIRE

95, rue Saint-Paul

A local institution since 1976, Buffet de l'Antiquaire is a diner serving traditional Quebecois comfort foods. Local characters arrive early in the morning for breakfast, filling the counter, then spilling into the booths and tables; by lunchtime the restaurant is filled with tourists. Maple syrup can be added to any dish for a small charge, but one of the best ways to enjoy it is in pouding chômeur. This rich, dense blue-collar dessert dates back to the Great Depression and is made by adding maple syrup to cake batter. Think of it as a Quebecois bread pudding smothered with maple syrup. While many restaurants give pouding chômeur a little zhuzh, Buffet de l'Antiquaire celebrates its simplicity.

HONŌ IZAKAYA

670, rue Saint-Joseph Est

Honō Izakaya in Saint-Roch is a neutral-toned minimalist Japanese restaurant. It quickly became a neighborhood favorite when it opened in 2018, serving Japanese small plates perfect for sharing over drinks. No reservations were needed in the early days, but now it is almost impossible to dine here without one. The menu is centered around tataki, sashimi, yakitori, and artisanal cocktails created by barman and co-owner Julien Vézina, who masterfully blends Japanese and Quebec flavors and spirits. Sokkyō is a Manhattan-inspired cocktail made with Nikka Whisky From the Barrel (a blend of over 100 different malts and grain whiskies), Barolo Chinato vermouth, shochu, ponzu, and maple syrup. It's garnished with confit shiitake. The full-bodied cocktail pairs well with the Nagano pork belly yakitori, dusted with a twinkling shichi-mi tōgarashi.

Diner Saint-Sauveur's buttermilk-brined chicken is drizzled with maple syrup.

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Dinner Is Served

This month's cold-weather comforts include a flaky, golden brown cod served with roasted potatoes, a toothsome orzo in a silky and savory butternut squash sauce, and more

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR.

COD WITH LEMON BUTTER SAUCE

No wine? No problem. Lemon gives all the brightness and lift necessary—tempered with a little honey and a few pats of butter. Dusting the fish with flour helps it achieve that golden brown color.

RECIPE BY KENDRA VACULIN

4 SERVINGS

1½ lb. small potatoes, halved, quartered if larger
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
⅓ cup all-purpose flour
4 4–6-oz. cod fillets, patted dry with paper towels
Freshly ground pepper
1 shallot, finely chopped
5 Tbsp. unsalted butter, divided
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. honey
¼ cup tarragon leaves, plus more for serving

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Place potatoes on a rimmed baking sheet, drizzle with oil, and season with salt. Toss to coat and arrange in a single layer. Roast until golden brown underneath, about 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, place flour on a plate. Season fish all over with salt and pepper. Lay one side of each fillet in flour to coat; shake off any excess and place, flour side up, on another plate. Heat remaining 2 Tbsp. oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high. Cook fish, flour side down, undisturbed, until golden brown and crisp underneath, 5–7 minutes. Turn; cook until just cooked through, about 1 minute. Transfer, flour side up, to a clean plate.

3. Add shallot and 3 Tbsp. butter to same pan. Cook, stirring occasionally, until shallot is slightly softened, 1–2 minutes. Add lemon juice, mustard, honey, ½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt, and 1 cup water. Cook, stirring often, until thickened, 6–8 minutes. Remove from heat; add ¼ cup tarragon and remaining 2 Tbsp. butter and stir until sauce is emulsified. Season with salt.

4. Arrange fish, flour side up, in pan and spoon some sauce over. Season with pepper and scatter more tarragon on top. Serve with potatoes on the side.

FOOD STYLING BY MICAH MORTON. PROP STYLING BY SEAN DOOLEY.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH ORZO WITH FRIED SAGE

Canned butternut squash purée (pumpkin is a fine substitute) makes this cozy cold-weather dish come together in a snap. Just try not to eat all the brown-butter-fried sage before the pasta is ready.

RECIPE BY KENDRA VACULIN

4 SERVINGS

- 5 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- ¼ cup (packed) sage leaves
- 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
- 2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 15-oz. can butternut squash purée
- 2 Tbsp. double-concentrated tomato paste
- ½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 12 oz. orzo
- 3 oz. Parmesan, finely grated (about 1½ cups)

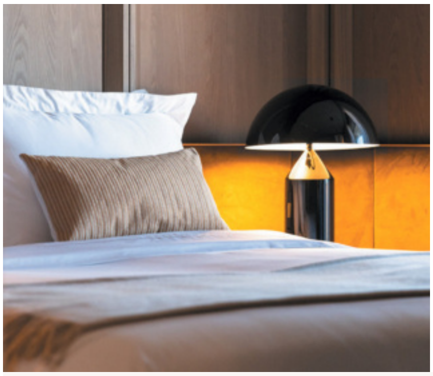
1. Heat butter in a medium saucepan over medium, stirring often, until it foams, then just starts to brown, about 5 minutes. Add sage and cook, stirring constantly, until crisp, about 1 minute. Pour butter through a fine-mesh sieve set over a small bowl. Season sage in sieve with salt. Set brown butter and sage aside separately.

2. Heat oil in a medium Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium-high. Cook onion, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden brown around the edges, 6–8 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute.

3. Add squash purée, tomato paste, red pepper flakes, and 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt and cook, stirring often, until mixture is thickened and slightly darkened in color, about 5 minutes.

4. Pour broth and 1½ cups water into pot. Increase heat to high; bring to a boil. Add orzo; reduce heat and simmer, stirring often and scraping up any pasta stuck to bottom of pot, until tender and sauce is thickened, 10–12 minutes (it will thicken more as it cools). Remove from heat and add Parmesan and reserved brown butter; stir vigorously to combine. Taste orzo; season with more salt if needed.

5. Ladle orzo into shallow bowls and top with reserved fried sage.



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STEAKHOUSE SALAD WITH BLACK PEPPER DRESSING

Bitter winter greens give this salad an edge with their intense flavor and robust crunch. But for those craving something milder, iceberg lettuce torn into large chunks or cut into wedges works too. And a quick note on portion size: A single 1-lb. steak will feed about two people, so feel free to double the recipe and cook them together (they will have no trouble taking on a deep sear side by side in the pan).

RECIPE BY JESSE SZEWCZYK

2 SERVINGS

1	1-lb. New York strip steak, 1"–1¼" thick
	Kosher salt
1	tsp. freshly ground pepper, plus more
4	thick-cut slices bacon (about 6 oz.), cut into ¼"-thick pieces
1	garlic clove, finely grated
1	cup sour cream
½	cup mayonnaise
1	Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
	Juice of 1 lemon
8	oz. radicchio and/or frisée (about 1 medium head of either or ½ head of each), torn into 2" pieces
½	cup crumbled blue cheese, plus more for serving
½	cup thinly sliced chives and/or torn dill, plus more for serving
	Extra-virgin olive oil (for drizzling)

1. Season steak all over with salt and pepper; set aside.

2. Cook bacon in a large skillet over medium heat, stirring often, until browned and crisp, 6–8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towels.

3. Add reserved steak to same pan; cook, turning every 2 minutes or so, until deeply browned and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part registers 125°, 8–10 minutes for medium-rare. Transfer to a cutting board and let rest 10 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, whisk garlic, sour cream, mayonnaise, Worcestershire sauce, and 1 tsp. pepper in a medium bowl; season dressing with salt. Spread over a platter.

5. Place bacon, lemon juice, radicchio, ½ cup blue cheese, ½ cup chives, and a pinch of salt in a large bowl. Drizzle with oil; toss to combine. Mound on platter.

6. Slice steak against the grain on a diagonal; arrange over salad. Top with more blue cheese and chives.

ONE-POT CHICKEN THIGHS WITH CILANTRO RICE AND BEANS

A carefully calibrated amount of rice and water ensures everything cooks at exactly the same rate, so don't eyeball it. Making your own sofrito on a weeknight is a commitment that's well worth the effort; it provides a deeply savory foundation that perfumes both the rice and chicken.

RECIPE BY JESSE SZEWCZYK

4 SERVINGS

2	lb. skinless, boneless chicken thighs (6–8)
1	tsp. freshly ground pepper
1	tsp. ground cumin
3	tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1¾ tsp. Morton kosher salt, divided
1	bunch cilantro, rinsed well, tough stems removed
1	medium onion, chopped
1	medium green bell pepper, ribs and seeds removed, chopped
6	garlic cloves
3	Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1	15.5-oz. can black beans, rinsed
1½	cups long-grain white rice (do not rinse)
	Crumbled Cotija cheese and lime wedges (for serving; optional)

1. Place a rack in middle of oven; preheat to 375°. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and sprinkle all over with pepper, cumin, and 2 tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt. Set aside.

2. Set aside a small handful of cilantro for serving if desired. Blend onion, bell pepper, garlic, and remaining cilantro in a blender on high speed until mostly smooth. Set aside.

3. Heat oil in a large high-sided ovenproof skillet with a lid over medium-high. Working in batches if needed, cook reserved chicken in a single layer, undisturbed, until deeply browned underneath, 6–8 minutes. Transfer to a plate, arranging browned side up. (Chicken will still be raw.)

4. Cook reserved purée in same pan over medium heat, stirring often, until it dries out into a loose, tomato-paste-like texture, 6–8 minutes. Add beans, rice, remaining 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt, and 1½ cups water; bring to a simmer, then immediately remove pan from heat.

5. Arrange chicken, browned side up, on top of beans and rice; cover pan. (If lid doesn't fit well, cover pan with foil first.) Transfer to oven; bake 45 minutes. (Be exact; don't peek.) Turn off oven; let sit in oven (still covered) 10 minutes.

6. Remove pan from oven, uncover, and fluff rice with a fork. Scatter Cotija cheese (if using) and cilantro if you reserved some over. Serve with lime wedges if desired.

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Ramhofer gives Boba the dog a treat.

Home Sweet Home

Tam Pham and **Harrison Ramhofer,** the chef-somm couple behind Miami's Tâm Tâm, invite us into their custom kitchen

BY KATE KASSIN ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFONSO DURAN

Tam Pham and Harrison Ramhofer are ready to cook (and drink) at home again. Their Vietnamese drinking food and natural wine spot Tâm Tâm has been open for two years, during which time it garnered accolade after accolade (including being named one of Bon Appétit's Best New Restaurants of 2024), and their home kitchen renovation is finally complete. At work, the husband-husband duo divide and conquer responsibilities—Pham is the chef and Ramhofer is the sommelier—but they applied a more blended process to their kitchen redesign. Together, they landed on an app-connected smart oven that doubles as an air fryer, a rice cooker that makes delicious use of restaurant leftovers, and a clever system that helps them keep their 26-bottle wine fridge full while still enjoying sips of their favorite vintages. It's a kitchen inspired by their years in the restaurant industry but grounded in how, and where, they spend their time away from it all: with a cold drink and a warm meal, in the comfort of home.

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TOP: *Ramhofer pours a glass of wine using the Coravin.* BELOW: *Pham scoops hot rice from his Zojirushi.*

Fellow Opus Conical Burr Coffee Grinder

$200; amazon.com

Pham spent a few years working at Starbucks as both a barista and a manager and leaned on those experiences when designing their at-home coffee setup. Namely, he prioritizes high-quality beans, grinds them fresh, and keeps the brewing efficient. He uses the Fellow grinder, which he praises for how neatly and finely it breaks down his La Colombe beans, then transfers the grounds to a steeping bag. After 48 hours in the fridge, there's a big jug of cold brew for the week ahead.

Samsung Smart Slide-In Electric Range in Stainless Steel

Price upon request; samsung.com

The Samsung Smart Range is loaded with high-tech features, like an app that can change the temperature of the oven or adjust cook time, and voice-assistant integration that lets you talk to the oven and ask it to preheat. But the couple's favorite is air fryer mode. They use it to heat up the banh mi they buy on Sundays from a nearby Vietnamese bakery. In just five minutes the oven transforms day-old sandwiches into a hot, crispy delight.

Zojirushi NS-TSC10 5½-Cup Micom Rice Cooker and Warmer

$199; amazon.com

At work, Pham uses a commercial rice cooker that can cook five quarts at a time, but at home he loves his Zojirushi and its more reasonable yield. Pham bought the rice cooker as a birthday gift for his younger sister, Lyn, who lives with the couple, and says they'll never go back to any other. It cooks multiple varieties of rice, adjusting the time and suggested water levels with its fuzzy-logic programming. It's also an ideal warmer for congee, the rice porridge they often make with leftovers from the restaurant.

KingChii 26-Bottle Dual Zone Wine Cooler

$450; amazon.com

Ramhofer is trying to drink a bit less while not on the job. The dual-zone wine fridge he installed preserves his collection at ready-to-drink temps (the whites on top are held at a slightly lower temperature than the reds on the bottom), but "the one thing about having a wine fridge is that it's always empty. You end up always drinking it," he says. A Coravin Timeless Three+ wine system ($279; amazon.com), which uses a thin needle to extract wine without removing the cork, lets him indulge in a single glass without sacrificing the quality of the rest of the bottle.

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MICROWAVE MUG CAKE

This rich, gooey chocolate dessert is Bon Appétit Test Kitchen–perfected

BY SHILPA USKOKOVIC
PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS RAINEY

There are many takes on mug cakes out there, but this truly pantry-friendly version is one you'll want to save. It's egg-free, but the lack of an egg isn't a compromise; it's a deliberate move. Without an egg, the crumb is loose and delicate, leaving the cake with a pudding-like center that allows the intensity of the cocoa powder to shine through. It delivers all the vibes of chocolate cake—rich, sticky, satisfying—with barely any effort.

Perhaps the most important thing in the making of this mug cake is harnessing the transformative precision offered by your microwave's power button. Cooking the cake at 50 percent power ensures it's cooked through but moist from edge to center, with little to no risk of erupting out of the mug. Just one more reason why this mug cake is different from other recipes out there.

Now that you have warm cake, you can go the extra mile and dollop on some whipped cream, a scoop of ice cream, or rainbow sprinkles (most welcome in my book). The joy of this cake is its immediacy—a sweet treat that you can make faster than you can decide what to watch on the telly.

HERE'S HOW TO MAKE IT

Using a small whisk or a fork, mix ⅓ **cup (42 g) all-purpose flour**, ¼ **cup (50 g) sugar**, **2 Tbsp. Dutch-process cocoa powder**, ½ **tsp. baking powder**, and a **large pinch of salt** in a large microwave-safe mug to combine. Add **2 Tbsp. vegetable oil** and ¼ cup room-temperature water and stir until mixture is smooth.

Microwave cake on 50% power until puffed and cooked through (surface should be mostly matte), about 3 minutes. Let cool 2 minutes. Top with **whipped cream or ice cream** to serve if desired. *Makes 1*

FOOD STYLING BY STEVIE STEWART. PROP STYLING BY GERRI WILLIAMS.

Sharp Skates, a Wobbly Quiche, and the Perfect Pan

EDITOR IN CHIEF **JAMILA ROBINSON** ON RESTORATIVE SESSIONS AT THE ICE RINK AND HER SIGNATURE WINTER BAKE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRAVIS RAINEY

I love to skate outdoors, to enjoy the rumble as my blades cut through the ice, then the *pop*-pause-*swish* of landing a toe loop or lutz jump. But ice-skating is more than artistry and mindfulness. It's a full-body workout that demands energy from ample carbs and protein. The crossovers, turns, and glides that work glutes, abs, and calves require as much endurance as running but with less impact (all while wearing a pretty dress). After a session at the rink, I crave refueling with this greens-and-cheese quiche. It's baked in a crust flecked with herbes de Provence and filled with Parmesan and Gruyère, baby spinach, and luscious sweet onions. I serve it all winter long, in wide wedges for friends at my skating club or in elegant slices for holiday brunches at home.

CARAMELIZED ONION AND SPINACH QUICHE

8 SERVINGS

The ratio of one part whole wheat flour to four parts all-purpose works for most recipes, and in pastry applications like this, it adds a nutty depth of flavor without sacrificing any flakiness.

CRUST

1 cup (125 g) all-purpose flour
¼ cup (31 g) whole wheat flour
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt
1 tsp. herbes de Provence
10 Tbsp. unsalted butter, sliced ½" thick
Rice flour or all-purpose flour (for dusting)

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY

1 large sweet onion (such as Vidalia), thinly sliced
1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
3 large eggs
3 sprigs thyme, leaves finely chopped
½ cup heavy cream
½ cup whole milk
½ tsp. freshly ground pepper
2 oz. Gruyère, finely grated
1 oz. Parmesan, finely grated
2 cups baby spinach

CRUST Whisk all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, salt, and herbes de Provence in a medium bowl. Add butter and toss to coat. Using your fingers, smash butter into smaller flat pieces (about chickpea-size). Make a well in center; pour in ¼ cup ice water. Toss with your hands to distribute, then knead in bowl a few times to bring dough together (some dry bits may remain).

Turn dough out onto a surface lightly dusted with rice flour, then dust top of dough with flour. Roll out to a ½"-thick rectangle. Fold dough in half, rotate 90°, and fold in half again. Roll out again to a ½"-thick rectangle; repeat folding process, dusting with more flour as needed to prevent sticking. Pat dough into a ½"-thick disk; wrap tightly in plastic. Chill at least 2 hours and, preferably, up to 12 hours.

Let dough sit at room temperature 5 minutes. Unwrap and roll out on a lightly floured surface to a 12" round about ⅛" thick. Brush off excess flour; transfer to a 9"-diameter quiche or pie pan. Lift edges and allow dough to slump down into pan; press firmly into bottom and sides. Trim, leaving about a 1" overhang. Fold overhang onto itself; press firmly to seal. Crimp edges if desired. Chill 15 minutes.

Place a rack in lower third of oven; preheat to 375°. Place crust on a parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet. Crumple 2 sheets of parchment paper; unfold and line crust. Fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake until edges of crust are golden brown and bottom is opaque (carefully lift parchment to check), 30–35 minutes. Lift out parchment and weights. Reduce oven temperature to 350°. Bake until golden brown all over, 12–18 minutes.

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY While the crust is baking, mix onion, oil, and a large pinch of salt in a medium skillet. Cover pan and cook onion over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until softened and translucent, 8–10 minutes. Uncover and cook, adding splashes of water (up to ¼ cup) and stirring and scraping bottom of pan often, until deep golden brown, 12–15 minutes.

Whisk eggs, thyme, cream, milk, pepper, and 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt in a medium bowl. Toss together Gruyère and Parmesan in a small bowl. Spread caramelized onion evenly over crust. Sprinkle half of cheese on top. Scatter spinach, then remaining cheese over. Pour in egg mixture and lightly press spinach down with a spoon to submerge.

Bake quiche until edges of filling are set but center still wobbles slightly when gently shaken, 45–50 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack; let cool 1 hour before slicing.

DO AHEAD: Quiche can be baked 2 days ahead. Let cool completely; tightly wrap and chill.

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FOOD STYLING BY LUCIANA LAMBOY. PROP STYLING BY SEAN DOOLEY.

A Whole New Swirl

***Bon Appétit*'s art director discusses how five artists are rolling the classic yule log into fresh terrain**

BY INGU CHEN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOBBY DOHERTY

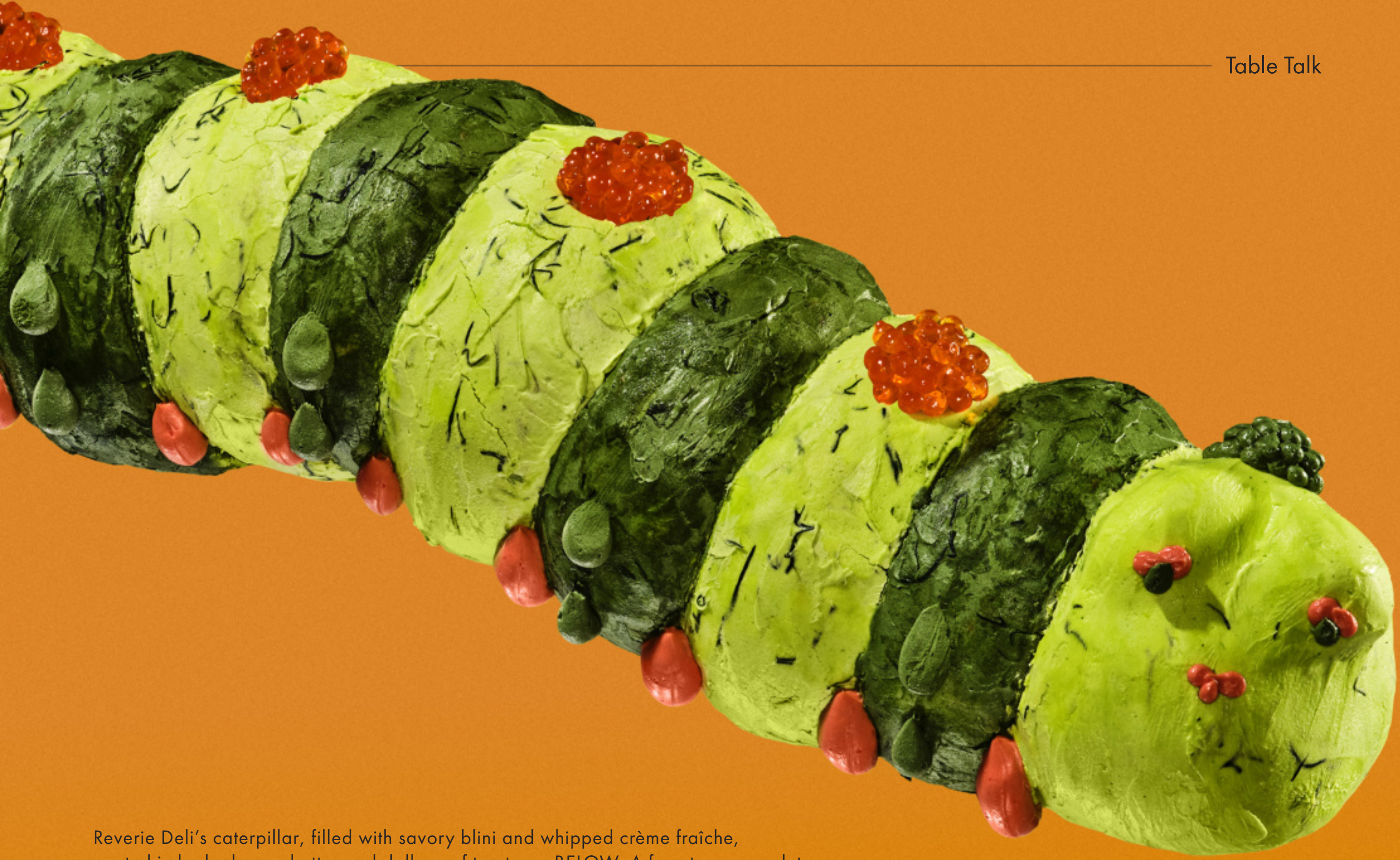
I've long been a fan of the roll cake: its tubular shape, hypnotically coiled cross section, and puffy round slice. Yet, decoration rarely ventures beyond a smattering of berries and cream or, in the Yule log's case, a fork-carved grain. The bûche de Noël first originated in 19th-century Parisian patisseries, inspired by a timeworn European tradition in which a village or household member scoured the wintry woods for a log massive enough to burn for 12 consecutive days. The festive dessert evokes Christmas hearths of yore with an unmistakable chocolate "bark" and marzipan-and-meringue-sculpted fairy-tale forest embellishments.

Though the yule log had once sprouted from a place of whimsical evolution (not many of us are reliably lugging colossal hunks of wood home), its flavors and construction have yet to experience the breadth of remix its flat-sheet and round-tiered kin have undergone. Nearly two centuries later we find today's eater expecting surprise as much as they crave nostalgia—priming the bûche de Noël for play. That's why this holiday season we invited five artist-bakers to reimagine the cake beyond its brown buttercream bounds and into a new tablescape-worthy terrain.

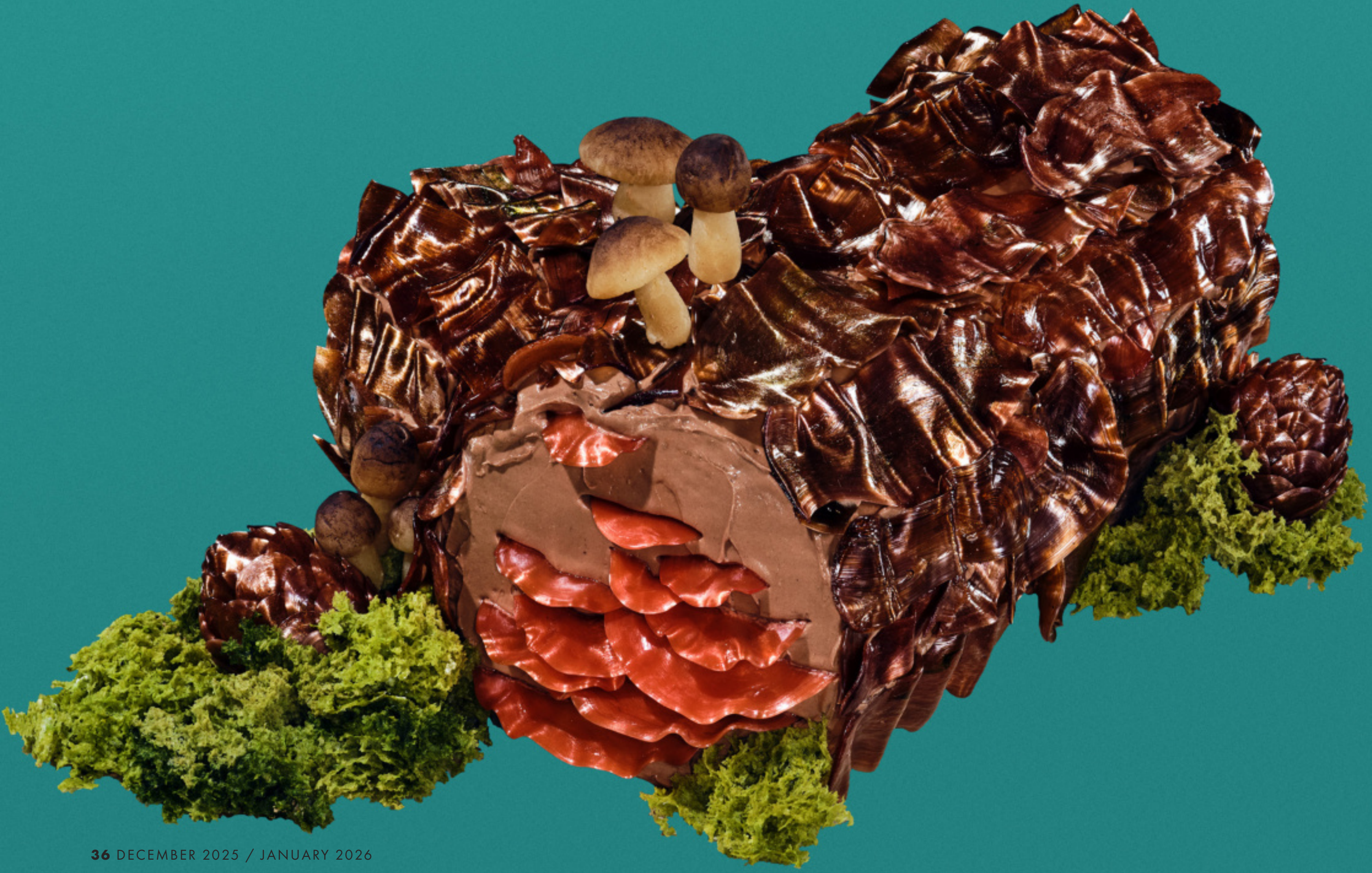
Mina Park (known by her bakery moniker 99) paints her airy whipped cream with vibrant green to honeyed ombré in a bamboo-inspired design. Lauren Schofield's signature mosaics appear against a snowy alpine canvas, paved with candied fruit that sparkle like frosted gems. Ayako Kurokawa (Burrow) references the Baumkuchen with her elegant stump cake built in tree-ring-like layers. Riffing on celebratory holiday spreads from her childhood, Michelle Ashurov (Reverie Deli) trusses a savory caterpillar with swirling blini, herbed butter, and trout roe. And Jen Monroe (Bad Taste) encases the original Yule log formula—a familiar forest ecosystem—in a sugary shell as iridescent and improbable as blown glass. Each is a spiraling rendition paying homage to the log's playful roots.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 99's "bamboo" cake, with pandan sponge and buttery mung bean cream, adorned with white chocolate leaves and melon skin bows; a "stump" composed of coconut biscuit, chestnut cream, and yuzu curd, wrapped in torched meringue bark by Burrow; sugared kumquats and cranberries stud Lauren Schofield's chocolate, hazelnut praline whip, and Swiss meringue buttercream candied creation.

FOOD STYLING BY MICHELLE GATTON. PROP STYLING BY ANDREA BONIN.



Reverie Deli's caterpillar, filled with savory blini and whipped crème fraîche, coated in herby brown butter and dollops of trout roe. BELOW: A forest scene replete with pulled-sugar bark and fungi, sponge cake moss, and marzipan mushrooms by Bad Taste.



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bon appétit

Test kitchen baking experts Jesse Szewczyk and Shilpa Uskokovic share must-make recipes and answer your burning questions.

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Make-Ahead Morning

A grand breakfast enhances the festive vibes of a holiday morning. Consider these recipes the golden ticket: a ham-and-cheese-studded casserole with browned croissant peaks, plus a glossy babka bake with luscious waves of Nutella. Build them the night before and bake them in the morning and you'll be relishing a big, beautiful meal in no time at all.

BY JESSE SZEWCZYK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRAVIS RAINEY

HAM-AND-CHEESE-CROISSANT BAKE

8 SERVINGS

Ham-and-cheese croissant meets quiche in this breakfast casserole, making it both flaky and delightfully lush. If you have stale or less than perfect croissants on hand, this is the time to use them. Any croissant will shine bright here, so no need to be fancy. But make sure to measure them out by weight as every croissant is different.

9–10-oz. croissants (about 10 small), split
6 oz. thinly sliced Gruyère
6 oz. thinly sliced ham
5 large eggs
2 cups heavy cream
2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt
1 tsp. freshly ground pepper
¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
Thinly sliced chives (for serving)

Cover bottom croissant halves with a slice of Gruyère and a slice of ham, trimming and tucking as desired to fit; close up with top halves. Cut in half on a deep diagonal.

Whisk eggs, cream, mustard, salt, pepper, and nutmeg in a large bowl until smooth. Pour half of custard into a 1½-qt. baking dish. Arrange filled croissants in dish, keeping cheese and ham in place as much as possible, then evenly pour remaining custard over to saturate croissants. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and chill at least 1 hour.

Place a rack in upper third of oven and preheat to 325°. Uncover and bake casserole until top is very slightly golden brown, 40–50 minutes.

Heat broiler. Broil casserole just until deep golden brown, about 1 minute. Let cool slightly, then scatter chives over to serve.

DO AHEAD: Unbaked casserole can be assembled 1 day ahead. Keep chilled.

COMPLETE THE MEAL

Serve the croissant bake alongside yogurt with fresh citrus for a refreshing bite. Or, simply dress a bowl of greens in olive oil and vinegar to turn this dish into a full-blown bistro breakfast.

FOOD STYLING BY LUCIANA LAMBOY. PROP STYLING BY SEAN DOOLEY.

BABKA FRENCH TOAST BAKE

8 SERVINGS

This breakfast casserole riffs on the chocolate-cinnamon flavors in babka to create a sweet and filling dish that can feed a crowd. Brushing the hot babka bake with simple syrup, then baking it for an extra 10 minutes caramelizes the sugar, providing a crisp contrast to the custardy interior.

⅔ cup Nutella or other chocolate hazelnut spread
1 1-lb. loaf challah or white Pullman bread, sliced ½" thick
8 large eggs
3 cups heavy cream
1 Tbsp. vanilla extract
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 cup (packed; 200 g) dark brown sugar, divided

Spread a thin layer of Nutella on one side of each slice of bread, then cut in half on a diagonal. Set aside.

Whisk eggs, cream, vanilla, salt, cinnamon, and ⅔ cup (133 g) brown sugar in a large bowl until smooth. Pour half of custard into a 13x9" baking dish. Shingle reserved bread, Nutella side up, in dish, overlapping as needed to create a zigzag-like pattern. Pour remaining custard over to saturate bread. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and chill at least 1 hour.

Place a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 375°. Remove dish from fridge and with plastic wrap still on, gently press down on bread to settle further into dish and create a more flat, shingled appearance. Uncover and bake until golden brown, 35–40 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat remaining ⅓ cup (67 g) brown sugar and 3 Tbsp. water in a small saucepan over high, stirring often, just until sugar is dissolved and syrup is hot, 2–3 minutes.

Immediately brush all of syrup evenly over casserole. Bake until top is shiny and candy-like and bread is a shade darker, 8–10 minutes. Let cool slightly before serving.

DO AHEAD: Unbaked casserole can be assembled 1 day ahead. Keep chilled.

COMPLETE THE MEAL

For a savory counterpoint to your babka bake, make a quick frittata with whatever bits and bobs you have hanging out in your fridge. Just sauté your vegetables in a skillet, pour in a mixture of eggs whisked with a splash of cream, and bake until set.

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A TASTE OF SUNSHINE

Soak up the sun at America's Favorite Beaches in St. Pete-Clearwater, Florida, where breezy days meet flavor-filled nights, MICHELIN-recommended restaurants never disappoint, and Gulf-to-grill seafood is an every-meal staple.

IF A DREAMY BEACH GETAWAY IS beckoning to whisk you out of Dodge, paradise is closer than you think. **St. Pete-Clearwater, Florida**, famed for its sugar-white sand, warm emerald Gulf waters, and year-round sun, is the perfect retreat within reach (it's an easy, nonstop hop from most major hubs). There's a reason it's earned the title, America's Favorite Beaches: Each stretch of sand has its own signature stamp. Whether you're after relaxed vibes by the tide, an active beachfront oasis, or an up-close encounter with nature, there's a beach for that.

While the region is hailed for its sun-drenched beaches, breezy living, and coastal charm, it's equally earned its chops as a food-lover's playground. Packed with flavor from beach to street, St. Pete-Clearwater has a robust resto and bar community—serving up everything from local fish shacks and Michelin-recommended restaurants to beach bars and one epic beer trail.

At **Elliott Aster**, a new restaurant at the Vinoy Resort & Golf Club helmed by Michelin-starred chef Lee Wolen, diners can savor wood-fired steaks, fresh seafood, and handmade pastas—all in a sleek, waterfront setting. In downtown St. Pete, **Juno & the Peacock** delights with every bite of its modern takes on coastal classics like crab-crusted grouper. Just next door, **Pluma** cocktail lounge pairs swanky vibes with South and Central American-influenced drinks for a truly creative experience. To end the night in an inspired way, look no further than Pier Teaki, a rooftop bar at the St. Pete Pier. Here, sweeping Tampa Bay water views and tropical cocktails keep the good times flowing.

In this Gulf Coast destination, grouper is basically a food group, and gulf-to-grill sandwiches starring the staple ingredient are a must-try. The iconic eats are best served at Frenchy's Rockaway Grill, where you can dine right in the sand on Clearwater Beach. Or try a seafood sammy from one of the many restaurants of **John's Pass Village and Boardwalk** on Madeira Beach—the Grouper Capital of the World. Looking for a fine-dining, five-star fare experience? **The Black Pearl** in Dunedin never disappoints with French and New American cuisine and fresh ingredients.

While all of St. Pete-Clearwater's eateries deserve recognition, four standout establishments are officially deemed Michelin-recommended restaurants. **Fortu**, in St. Pete's Ponce De Leon Hotel, spices things up with creative Pan-Asian cuisine. **Sushi Sho Rexley** in downtown St. Pete is the only spot to truly savor omakase-style dining, where every bite is at the chef's whim. Also in downtown St. Pete is **Il Ritorno**, which puts a modern spin on traditional Italian cuisine. And in Safety Harbor, **The Tides Market** keeps things coastal with thoughtfully sourced seafood, meats, produce, and pantry goods.

No trip to St. Pete-Clearwater is complete without hitting the famous **Gulp Coast Craft Beer Trail**. Stretching from Tarpon Springs in the north to downtown St. Pete, this flavorful journey showcases more than 40 locally owned breweries—from quirky hole-in-the-wall gems to sleek modern tasting rooms. One highlight is **Dunedin Brewery** in Dunedin, where history and hops come together in every pour at Florida's oldest microbrewery.

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Slow Foods

After a workout injury, a steaming bowl of guisado taught me the power of rest

BY CLEYVIS NATERA ♦ ILLUSTRATION BY DROR COHEN
PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLIOTT JEROME BROWN JR.

For an entire week I'd been lying as still as possible, sitting upright only to breastfeed my two-month-old baby girl, Penelope. Any time I moved, sharp rays of pain slithered up my lower back, radiating so intensely I had to clamp my eyes and mouth shut just to keep from crying out. My two-year-old son, Julian, took notice.

"Did that baby hurt you?" he asked, chunky little hands caressing my cheek.

"No," I reassured him. "Penelope didn't hurt me, Mommy hurt herself."

My predicament was not labor-related. In fact, I'd been stunned by how quickly I'd recovered post-C-section. Just a couple of weeks earlier, I had been flushed with an energy I never experienced when I gave birth to my son.

It was with this renewed vigor that I'd come across a barrage of headlines about the singer Ciara's post-baby body transformation. She had "snapped back," returning to her pre-baby weight with lightning speed.

I was used to a strong, fit body. Not long ago I'd completed a marathon and had even finished a few triathlons. Now, after my second child, there was a softness, a broadening of my figure I didn't want to accept. Outside, it was late summer and through my great room's street-facing windows in Montclair, New Jersey, I saw athletic bodies glowing golden, midriffs exposed in a blur of motion. I considered the remaining 12 weeks of my maternity leave. Why not reach toward a better-than-before-the-babies, celebrity-level body? I, too, could diet and take advantage of the extra caloric deficits from breastfeeding. I, too, could tackle intense workouts and shred the baby weight. So I ordered a DVD set for an at-home workout and decided to have my own snap-back summer.

Eating nothing but grilled chicken and lettuce for most meals, I made it all the way

The Fourth Trimester is a series where parents share the meals that nourished them postpartum. For more, head to bonappetit .com/fourth-trimester.

to day five when an overly enthusiastic burpee halted all dreams of a svelte physique. Upon flinging my body into the air, I realized something had gone terribly wrong. My husband carried me to our bed. I'd pulled my back out; after a couple weeks of rest, it would heal itself, my doctor assured me.

While I recovered, my mother agreed to stay with us. I knew what I craved, and she'd anticipated as much: Within an hour of arriving, a familiar, piquant aroma wafted from the kitchen. My mother hummed an old bolero song as she cooked, and the combination of her voice singing, "*Bésame, bésame mucho,*" and those sweet tomato-laden vapors felt, at the time, more potent than any painkillers I had been prescribed.

The scents and sounds transported me back to the Dominican Republic, my birthplace, to a time when my 10-year-old body climbed up the side of our simple concrete house easily, all the way to the roof, in search of a lost baseball or a few moments of solitude, when my agile body had known no pain.

Soon my mom presented me with a steaming plate of tender Dominican oxtail guisado in a red sauce. I handed her the baby, making a trade, and sat crooked on the couch, devouring the juicy meat, surprising myself at how hungry I'd been. My mother glanced at me with concern as she held Penelope and played with Julian, encouraging me to eat more, more, even bringing me extra servings so I could keep going. As I filled my belly, I could feel myself grow stronger, more alert. Yet there was something else about this meal that satisfied more than my hunger.

Making oxtail guisado entails a simple yet lengthy process, sometimes requiring three hours of slow-simmered cooking time, which was part of the reason I'd never bothered to learn how to make the dish myself. But as I enjoyed the savory flavors with a throbbing back, I was reminded of other major milestones in my life—both happy and difficult times when I'd eaten this dish, and how it had enriched me. Its consistency was a map that tracked where I'd been, who I'd been. Seeing my mother playing with my children created a sense of urgency within me.

"I want you to teach me how to make oxtails," I told my mother in Spanish.

The worry left her features immediately. She laughed so loudly her shoulders shook.

"In this state?" she asked. But I was determined to learn. My mother would be leaving for DR in just a week.

A few days later I stood beside her as she cut onions into thin slices. By then I could be on my feet as long as I moved slowly. The dried oregano bunches she'd bought from the Dominican grocery store were so aromatic I wanted to hang them in my bathroom, smell them every morning when I woke up. I pulled the small dry leaves, crushed them between my palms, the smoky, pungent fragrance jolting me awake.

My mother and I didn't need to talk as we worked. I had seen her do this from a distance countless times as a child, before I had any language to express how beautiful I thought she was. Over those three decades, her weight had often fluctuated, depending on whatever she was going through. Yet, I'd always looked on at her in wonder, admiring the way she comforted us with her presence and her skill. She was as beautiful then as she was now. Standing next to her, gingerly limiting my movements because of pain I'd inflicted to make myself smaller suddenly seemed absurd.

As the hours flowed, I added enough water for my oxtails to drown and boil, undisturbed. I was relieved the recipe called for resting time, for restraint. I went back to the couch, fed my baby, gave Julian a kiss, added more water to the meat, and went back to rest.

With each trip to the stove, I felt my body loosening up, the tension I'd been carrying dissipating bit by bit. For the first time in weeks, I was in less pain and aware of it. Instead of a "snap-back" summer, maybe I could slow down, make my body strong enough for my children, to fling them into the air and catch them as they descended.

It would be another couple of hours of rising and walking slowly to the pot. Sometimes I stayed for a few extra moments to watch the liquid reduce. There was something meditative about the way the water bubbled and burst, coaxing that tough meat to tenderness. When I took a big bite of my finished dish, I was delighted. The oxtails were succulent, deepened by the slow-cooked peppers and tomato paste, brightened by fresh cilantro. I gave my toddler a small piece to savor, and he opened wide for more. ♦

CLEYVIS NATERA
is the award-winning author of the novels *Neruda on the Park* and *The Grand Paloma Resort.*

OXTAIL GUISADO

4–6 SERVINGS

Unlike other versions of this slow-simmered dish that often feature brown sugar and soy sauce, this one is made with tomato paste. It lends body, a vibrant red hue, and a sweeter finish to the sauce. You can replace the adobo and sazón con culantro y achiote seasonings called for with more salt and pepper to taste if you can't find them. You can also use boneless short ribs if oxtails aren't available near you. They can potentially take less time to cook, so adjust the simmering time as needed.

OXTAILS

2½ lb. ½"–¾" thick oxtails
1 large red onion, thinly sliced
1 large green bell pepper, halved, ribs and seeds removed, cut into strips
1 bunch cilantro, tough stems removed, cut into 2"-long pieces
6 garlic cloves, finely grated
2 Tbsp. adobo seasoning (such as Goya)
2 Tbsp. dried oregano
2 tsp. sazón con culantro y achiote (such as Goya)
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
3 oz. tomato paste (about 6 Tbsp.)

SALAD AND ASSEMBLY

2 avocados, cut into ¾" pieces
1 large cucumber, peeled, cut into ¾" pieces
Juice of 1 lime
½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
Freshly ground pepper

OXTAILS Rinse oxtails under cool running water; drain and place in a large bowl. Add red onion, bell pepper, cilantro, garlic, adobo seasoning, dried oregano, and sazón con culantro y achiote and mix until meat is coated in seasonings.

Heat oil in a large heavy pot over medium-high. Working in 3–4 batches to avoid overcrowding the pot, add oxtails (try to leave most of the cilantro and vegetables in the bowl, but if some adhere, that's okay). Cook, turning halfway through, until browned, about 10 minutes per batch. Transfer to a plate as you go.

Return all oxtails to pot. Pour 4 cups water into bowl with remaining seasonings and vegetables, then add to pot. Bring to a simmer (still over medium-high heat); cover and cook until liquid is reduced by a fourth, about 30 minutes.

Stir tomato paste and a little oxtail cooking liquid together in a small bowl until paste is dissolved. Reduce heat to medium and stir tomato paste mixture into broth in pot. Re-cover pot, leaving lid slightly askew, and cook, skimming excess fat and foam from the surface and adding water (up to 1 cup) to keep oxtails covered and/or reducing heat to medium-low to prevent meat from burning underneath as needed, until meat separates from the bones and is tender, 45–60 minutes. (If meat still isn't tender after 60 minutes, add a little more water and continue cooking, checking for doneness and adding more water every 15 minutes, until ready.)

DO AHEAD: Oxtails can be cooked 3 days ahead. Transfer to an airtight container; cover and chill. Skim off any excess fat before reheating gently on stovetop or in microwave.

SALAD AND ASSEMBLY Gently toss avocados, cucumber, lime juice, ½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt, and a pinch of pepper in a large bowl to combine. Taste salad and season with more salt and pepper if needed.

Divide oxtails among plates; serve with salad on the side.

FOOD STYLING BY THU BUSER. PROP STYLING BY CHRISTINA ALLEN.

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Shell Yeah

Classic seafood bisque is luxuriously creamy, made by blending seafood shells (typically lobster) directly into the soup for added body and a silky texture. This garlicky shrimp scampi version embraces the same technique, extracting as much precious seafood flavor as possible from more economical, yet equally delicious, shrimp shells. The result is a robust dish that captures the essence of a bright and buttery Italian American staple, perfect for dinner parties.

BY JESSE SZEWCZYK ▲ PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS RAINEY

SHRIMP SCAMPI BISQUE

8–12 SERVINGS

Straining the soup after blending catches any lingering pieces of shells so the final texture is completely smooth and creamy.

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 lb. large shrimp, peeled, deveined, cut into ½" pieces, shells reserved
3 medium onions, finely chopped
1 large russet potato (about 14 oz.), peeled, cut into 1" pieces
3 celery stalks, chopped
2 medium carrots, peeled, chopped
16 garlic cloves, 10 smashed, 6 thinly sliced
2 bay leaves
⅓ cup double-concentrated tomato paste
1 cup dry white wine
½ cup cognac
8 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
½ cup heavy cream
1½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1 tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
Freshly ground pepper
1 lemon
2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
¼ cup finely chopped parsley

Heat ¼ cup oil in a medium Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium. Cook reserved shrimp shells, stirring often, until pink and browned in spots, 6–8 minutes. Add onions, potato, celery, carrots, smashed garlic, and bay leaves and cook, stirring often, until vegetables are softened and onion is browned in spots, 8–10 minutes.

Add tomato paste and cook, stirring often, until slightly darkened in color, about 5 minutes. Add wine and cognac and bring to a boil. Cook, stirring often, until reduced by about two thirds, about 4 minutes. Add broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium; simmer 20 minutes.

Working in batches, transfer soup to a blender and blend on medium-high speed until very smooth. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve lined with a layer of cheesecloth back into pot (use a chinois if you have one and skip the cheesecloth); discard solids. Stir cream and 1½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1 tsp. Morton kosher salt into soup. Season with more salt if needed and pepper. Set over low heat to keep warm.

Remove zest from lemon in wide strips with a vegetable peeler, leaving as much white pith behind as possible and thinly slice zest strips. Halve lemon and squeeze juice into a small bowl.

Heat remaining ¼ cup oil in a medium skillet over medium-high. Cook sliced lemon zest and sliced garlic, stirring often, until softened and fragrant, 2–3 minutes. Add shrimp and cook, stirring often, until cooked through, 1–2 minutes. Add butter and lemon juice; cook, stirring often, until sauce is emulsified and thickened slightly, 1–2 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper.

Ladle soup into bowls and top with shrimp mixture.

DO AHEAD: Soup (without shrimp topping) can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and chill.

PARTY PLANNER

GREAT FOR
Setting over a low flame so guests can ladle out and eat to their heart's content before the main meal.

SERVE WITH
Crusty bread or plush dinner rolls so guests can mop up every last drop. Need wine pairing ideas? Head to page 90!

TOOL KIT
For the creamiest texture you'll need a sieve, cheesecloth, and a high-powered blender. Our favorite model is the Vitamix 5200.

MAKE AHEAD
Prep a day in advance and quickly heat this up when ready to serve—but do wait to cook the shrimp topping until the day of.

FOOD STYLING BY LUCIANA LAMBOY. PROP STYLING BY SEAN DOOLEY.

Since printing our first issue in 1956, *Bon Appétit* has published tens of thousands of recipes. It would take literal decades to cook them all. So our editors handpicked the 56 recipes you must make this year, from weeknight-ready meatballs to an instant-classic chocolate cake. You can find the entire collection on our website by scanning the QR code below, and we'll be highlighting a staff favorite each month in print. Let's cook!

PHOTOGRAPH BY ISA ZAPATA

SHEET-PAN HALLOUMI

WHY WE LOVE IT

A colorful produce-packed vibrantly flavored meal in the middle of winter? Sounds too good to be true. But Emma Laperruque's fattoush-inspired Sheet-Pan Halloumi defies the odds. Spread onto a preheated rimmed baking sheet, oil-slicked Halloumi and torn pita become croutons (in the case of the cheese, gooey-centered ones). They'll soak up a zingy-sweet dressing to nail that signature crispy-gone-soggy texture. Take your mind off the bread and cheese for a moment—admittedly a challenge—and you're rewarded with a flash of juicy citrus and buttery avocado, plus bites of jalapeño to keep things sharp. I've even added a can of chickpeas or smoked fish to stretch the serving size further for dinner parties. The only concern is who will score the crispiest pieces of Halloumi.
—*Rebecca Firkser*

4 SERVINGS

3–4	medium pitas (about 8 oz.), torn into 1½" pieces
2	8–10-oz. packages Halloumi cheese, patted dry, torn into 1½" pieces
½	cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
1	tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more
¼	cup fresh lime juice
2	Tbsp. honey
2	medium oranges, preferably blood
1	large grapefruit
1	medium shallot, thinly sliced
1	medium jalapeño, thinly sliced, divided
⅔	cup coarsely chopped dill
1	large ripe avocado, halved, pit removed

Place a rack in middle of oven and set a rimmed baking sheet on rack; preheat oven to 400°. Toss pita pieces, cheese, ¼ cup oil, and a big pinch of salt in a large bowl until pita and cheese are well coated. Carefully spread out in a single layer on hot baking sheet; reserve bowl. Roast, tossing halfway through, until pita is crisp and cheese is golden brown on a few sides, 18–20 minutes.

Meanwhile, whisk lime juice, honey, 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt, and remaining ¼ cup oil in reserved bowl to combine. Set dressing aside.

Using a small sharp knife and working one at a time, cut away peel and white pith from oranges and grapefruit; discard. Halve citrus and cut into ½"-thick wedges and/or thinly slice (a mix of shapes is fun). Transfer citrus to bowl with reserved dressing. Add shallot and half of jalapeño, then pita pieces and cheese. Using 2 large spoons, gently toss to combine.

Transfer salad to a platter and scatter dill and remaining jalapeño over. Using a spoon, scoop out flesh from avocado in curls and arrange on top of salad. Drizzle any leftover dressing in bowl over.

FOOD STYLING BY MIEKO TAKAHASHI

Scan the QR code to see the full Bon Appétit 56 and to access our archive of more than 60,000 recipes.

Hometown Cookies

Six festive treats to transport you home for the holidays

This year, to assemble our own overstuffed cookie box, the Bon Appétit team created six recipes inspired by the flavors of their hometowns. From shortbread bars with Chicago's preeminent caramel-and-cheese popcorn mix as their muse to a delicate sandwich cookie evoking an afternoon tea in Chennai, India, these treats taste like our holidays of years past, spent in the places we hold most dear. We invite you to share in the memories and make them a part of your gathering. Each will bring a little sweetness to your table no matter where you're celebrating. *—Kendra Vaculin*

PHOTOGRAPHS
by Travis Rainey

FOOD STYLING
by Micah Morton

PROP STYLING
by Marina Bevilacqua

THE JIG WAS UP the year our Christmas presents were held hostage by the frosted-over trunk of my parents' car—a rare occurrence for typically mild Tennessee winters. At nine years old, I was the youngest and already suspicious, but Santa's frozen gifts confirmed it: The holiday no longer hinged on his arrival. From then on, our Christmas Eve ritual took a new form—fancy dinner, followed by midnight Mass, then home for presents before traipsing to bed. But before any unwrapping could begin, my mother would dash to the kitchen to whip up a batch of hot chocolate. She always used Nesquik, a chocolaty powder containing, among other things, a whisper of cinnamon. Eventually, my siblings and I would decline the cocoa, opting to pour ourselves a cocktail instead, but the memory of those flavors is still with me. Come to think of it, these milky sweet and warmly spiced cookies would taste as good with a whiskey on the rocks as they would a warm glass of milk. *—Joe Sevier*

Hot Chocolate Cookies

MAKES ABOUT 18

1 cup (125 g) all-purpose flour
½ cup (43 g) Dutch-process cocoa powder
¼ cup (32 g) cornstarch
2 Tbsp. nonfat dry milk powder
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. baking soda
1 cup (packed; 200 g) dark brown sugar
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt
2 large eggs
2 tsp. vanilla extract
4 oz. high-quality milk chocolate (35%–45% cacao), coarsely chopped
3 Tbsp. (or more) marshmallow creme

Place racks in upper and lower thirds of oven; preheat to 350°. Sift flour, cocoa powder, cornstarch, milk powder, baking powder, cinnamon, and baking soda into a medium bowl.

Using an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat brown sugar, butter, and salt in a large bowl until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs one at a time, beating after each addition until combined before adding the next; beat in vanilla. Reduce speed to low and add half of dry ingredients; beat just until combined. Add remaining dry ingredients and beat until no streaks remain. Add chocolate; gently fold in with a rubber spatula just until evenly distributed.

Using a #40 cookie scoop (about 2 Tbsp.), portion out 12 cookies (dough will be very sticky), dividing between 2 parchment-lined baking sheets and spacing at least 2" apart. Dollop about ½ tsp. marshmallow creme onto each cookie; smooth and swirl into and over dough as desired.

Bake cookies, rotating baking sheets top to bottom and front to back halfway through, until spread out and slightly puffed, 10–12 minutes. Remove from oven.

For perfectly round cookies, working quickly one at a time, place an inverted glass or a round cutter with a diameter slightly larger than cookies over or around and scoot in a circular motion to smooth edges.

Let cookies cool on baking sheets. Using a spatula, transfer to a wire rack. Repeat baking process with remaining dough and marshmallow creme to make about 6 more cookies.

DO AHEAD: Cookies can be baked 3 days ahead. Store airtight at room temperature.

JOE SAYS

My favorite chocolate for snacking, and for these cookies, is the 38 percent milk chocolate bar from Lake Champlain ($6 for a 3-oz. bar; lakechamplainchocolates.com). A powerful ground cinnamon is also ideal, such as Frontier Co-Op's Korintje ($6; frontiercoop.com) or Burlap and Barrel's Royal Cinnamon ($10; burlapandbarrel.com).

BAKER'S NOTE

Don't just dollop the marshmallow creme; swirl it. A dollop will sit on top of the cookie without moving, while swirling it will pull a bit of the batter into the creme, creating the streaks that make it look like a marshmallow melting into a mug of hot chocolate.

THE WINDY CITY is famous for many things—hot dogs "dragged through the garden," Portillo's iconic chocolate cake, pizza as deep as lasagna—but perhaps my favorite of the bunch is Chicago-style popcorn. The kooky blend of cheddar and caramel corn is a Midwest staple, popularized by Garrett Popcorn and embraced for its perfect balance of sweet and savory flavors. Growing up in the Chicagoland area, I looked forward to the annual tin, unhinging my jaw as wide as possible while scarfing it down by the fistful. These bars borrow that same winning combination, reimagined into a cookie fit for the holidays. Savory cheddar shortbread does double duty, acting as a crisp base while also getting crumbled into a rubble-like topping alongside puffed caramel corn. A thick layer of chewy caramel holds everything together. It's an unexpected treat that's sure to steal the show. —*Jesse Szewczyk*

Cheddar Caramel Slices

MAKES 18

- **Nonstick vegetable oil spray (for pan)**
- **8 oz. extra-sharp orange cheddar, coarsely grated**
- **1¾ cups (219 g) all-purpose flour**
- **½ tsp. baking powder**
- **⅓ cup plus ¾ cup (217 g) granulated sugar**
- **2¾ tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1¾ tsp. Morton kosher salt, divided**
- **¾ cup (1½ sticks) chilled unsalted butter, cut into ½"-thick pieces, divided**
- **½ cup sweetened condensed milk**
- **1 cup caramel popcorn**

Place racks in upper third and middle of oven and preheat to 350°. Lightly coat an 8x8" baking pan, preferably metal, with nonstick spray. Line with 2 sheets of overlapping parchment paper, leaving a generous overhang on all sides. Lightly coat parchment with nonstick spray. Process cheddar, flour, baking powder, ⅓ cup (67 g) granulated sugar, and 2 tsp. Diamond Crystal or 1¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt in a food processor until cheese has almost disappeared into mixture and no large pieces remain. Add ½ cup butter and process until combined and mixture holds together when squeezed in your hand. (Dough will look dry and crumbly at first but will eventually come together.)

Add about two thirds of dough to prepared pan; press into an even layer across bottom with your hands. Crumble remaining dough over a parchment-lined baking sheet into dime-size pieces. Bake streusel on top rack and shortbread base on middle rack until streusel is golden brown and crunchy, 17–22 minutes, and shortbread is golden brown and firm, 32–38 minutes. Let both cool.

Meanwhile, heat remaining ¾ cup (150 g) granulated sugar and ¼ cup water in a medium saucepan over medium, swirling pan if needed (do not stir), until sugar is dissolved and syrup is boiling, 5–7 minutes. If sugar crystals start to form on sides of pan, brush with a wet pastry brush to dissolve. Continue to cook caramel, swirling occasionally, until deep mahogany and wisps of smoke rise from the surface, 10–14 minutes more. (Watch it closely; it can go from perfectly caramelized to burnt quickly. It's better to skew slightly over-caramelized than under.)

Remove caramel from heat and immediately add remaining ¼ cup butter (be careful as it will foam vigorously). Using a heatproof rubber spatula, preferably with a long handle, stir vigorously until butter is melted (it may look curdled at this point). Add condensed milk and remaining ¾ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt; stir until smooth. Pour evenly over cooled shortbread; spread with an offset spatula if needed. Immediately crumble streusel over, breaking up larger pieces (you want them chickpea-size). Scatter popcorn on top, then gently press both into caramel (be careful; it will still be hot). Chill at least 1 hour.

Run an offset spatula around edges of shortbread, then lift out of pan with parchment and transfer to a cutting board. Cut into thirds; cut each third into 6 rectangles to make 18 total. (For clean edges, score bars with a thin, sharp knife, cutting through topping and caramel, then use a serrated knife to saw gently through shortbread.)

DO AHEAD: Shortbread can be made 2 days ahead. Cover and keep chilled.

JESSE SAYS

A true Chicago-mix popcorn is as much about color as it is flavor, so make sure to pick up the most orangey block of cheddar you can find. The deep color of the resulting shortbread will scream cheese even before you take a bite. I like to use an extra-sharp aged cheddar, which strikes the right balance between color and flavor, but any bright orange brick will do.

BAKER'S NOTE

Bake your streusel and shortbread base past the point of the usual golden brown. They should be deep in color, almost burnt orange. The long baking time intensifies the cheese flavor, giving the streusel and shortbread a frico-like flavor reminiscent of a Cheez-It Extra Toasty cracker or the crispy skirt that forms on a grilled cheese.

GROWING UP in Chennai, I felt like I could tell time based on when hot drinks were served in our house. The city is famed for its coffee, blended with chicory root and poured into glasses in dramatic foot-long streams, but ours was a tea household. My parents' Guzzini mugs would come out promptly at 6:30 a.m. and once more at 4 p.m., the time I, with my mandated mug of milk, looked forward to most of all because it meant an accompanying packet of shortbread wasn't far away. We'd sit together with our basset hound, Droopy, in the orange-tiled backyard, my grandmother too, when she was still alive, drinking our drinks, dunking our biscuits, discussing what dinner might be (the dog's standing request was chicken gizzards). The combination of spiced milky tea and cookies will always be the taste of home to me. These tea-laced sandwich cookies capture that memory precisely. —*Shilpa Uskokovic*

Masala Tea Creme Pies

MAKES ABOUT 16

COOKIES

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
1 Tbsp. black tea leaves (from about 3 bags)
1 large egg
¾ cup (150 g) granulated sugar
1 tsp. Diamond Crystal or ½ tsp. Morton kosher salt
1 tsp. vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract
¼ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
1½ cups (187 g) all-purpose flour

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY

¾ cup (83 g) powdered sugar, sifted
6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature
1 tsp. (packed) finely grated peeled ginger
½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt
½ tsp. ground cardamom
½ tsp. vanilla bean paste or vanilla extract

COOKIES Place a rack in middle of oven; preheat to 375°. Melt butter in a small skillet over medium-low heat (don't let it boil). Stir in tea leaves, then pour into a medium bowl, scraping pan to get all the bits of tea. Let butter mixture sit until barely warm, about 10 minutes.

Add egg, granulated sugar, salt, and vanilla to butter mixture and mix vigorously with a rubber spatula until smooth. Add baking powder, baking soda, and cinnamon and mix again to combine. Add flour and mix until no dry streaks remain, making sure to scrape sides and bottom of bowl.

Divide dough into 32 portions (2 tsp. or 14 g each; easiest way to do this is to divide dough into quarters, then divide each quarter into 8 pieces). Roll each portion into a ball. Divide balls between 2 parchment-lined baking sheets, spacing evenly apart.

Working with 1 baking sheet at a time, bake cookies until puffed and dry to the touch, 6–8 minutes. Let cool on baking sheets.

DO AHEAD: Cookies can be baked 5 days ahead. Store airtight at room temperature.

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY Using an electric mixer, starting on low speed and moving to medium, beat powdered sugar, butter, ginger, salt, cardamom, and vanilla in a medium bowl until smooth and fluffy, about 3 minutes (or, you can use a whisk).

Transfer filling to a pastry bag fitted with a medium round tip. Turn half of the cookies over and pipe kisses of filling onto flat sides, dividing evenly (alternatively, you can dollop a heaping 1 tsp. filling onto each one). Place remaining cookies, right side up, on top, gently pressing until filling spreads almost to edges of cookies. Chill creme pies 10 minutes to allow filling to firm slightly before serving.

DO AHEAD: Creme pies can be assembled 2 days ahead. Transfer to an airtight container and chill. Bring to room temperature before serving.

SHILPA SAYS

Chai is a distinctly Northern Indian term. In Southern India, and particularly in Tamil Nadu, where I'm from, we often call it masala tea. While the mixture of spices used varies among regions, almost every version of masala tea includes ginger and cardamom.

BAKER'S NOTE

It's best to use finely ground tea from a tea bag here because of how seamlessly it dissolves into the dough. But fancier whole-leaf tea is fine to use as long as you crush it with a mortar and pestle before adding it to the melting butter (this will save you from having strips of tea leaves in your finished cookie).

I LEFT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AT 18—a few years shy of being able to reap the benefits of living so close to wine country. Now my trips home regularly feature a local bottle or two, which my dad carefully pairs with my mom's holiday cooking (I know, adorable). These pinwheel-style cookies use a classic sugar dough, rolled around a layer of quick cranberry jam made with red wine. The cranberries' acidity plays so well with the tannins in the wine, and their pectin firms up the jam so that it doesn't seep out when baked. While I'd never recommend baking (or cooking) with your best bottle, you can certainly serve these cookies alongside glasses of the good stuff. They're not too sweet and just as at home on a cheese plate as they are after dinner. —*Kendra Vaculin*

Cranberry-Wine Swirl Cookies

BAKER'S NOTE

This recipe is all about temperatures. The dough is easiest to roll when it's room temperature (malleable but not overly soft), and the cookies are easiest to slice after the dough log has chilled 1 hour in the freezer (it will be very firm but not frozen solid). The results are clean swirls and crisp slices that won't spread too much when baked.

KENDRA SAYS

I love that these cookies look so special, you'd never guess they're also a way to use up leftover ingredients. After Thanksgiving, there's inevitably a partial bag of cranberries idling in my freezer, and during dinner party season, my fridge door is always boasting at least one half-empty bottle of wine (recorked as best I could).

MAKES ABOUT 18

½	**tsp. baking powder**
1¾	**cups (219 g) all-purpose flour, plus more for surface**
½	**tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt, plus more**
⅔	**cup plus ¼ cup (183 g) granulated sugar**
1	**medium orange**
10	**Tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature**
1	**large egg, separated**
1½	**tsp. vanilla extract**
1¼	**cups fresh or frozen cranberries**
1	**cup red wine**
	Sanding sugar (for coating)

Whisk baking powder, 1¾ cups (219 g) flour, and ½ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt in a small bowl; set aside.

Place ⅔ cup (133 g) granulated sugar in a large bowl. Finely grate zest from orange into bowl and massage into sugar with your fingers until mixture starts to clump and is fragrant; set orange aside. Add butter and, using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat until smooth and creamy, about 1 minute. Add egg yolk and vanilla and beat to combine, about 30 seconds. Add reserved dry ingredients and mix on low speed just until a crumbly dough forms.

Place a large sheet of plastic wrap on a surface. Turn out dough onto plastic and pat into a rectangle, pressing down to make as thin as possible and making sides even (this will make dough easier to roll out later). Wrap dough up to enclose and chill 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, halve and juice reserved orange (you should have about ¼ cup); pour into a medium saucepan. Add cranberries, wine, remaining ¼ cup (50 g) granulated sugar, and a big pinch of salt. Set over medium-high heat; cook, stirring and scraping down sides often and smashing cranberries with a heatproof rubber spatula, until mixture thickens enough to hold a line when spatula is dragged through it and no whole berries remain, 11–13 minutes; let jam cool (it will continue to thicken as it cools).

Unwrap dough; reserve plastic wrap. Place dough on a lightly floured sheet of parchment paper on a surface and dust lightly with flour. Let sit 5 minutes, then, with a short side facing you, roll out to a 14x10" rectangle. Trim sides to straighten; discard scraps.

Spread a thin layer of jam over dough, going all the way to the edges on 3 sides and leaving a 1" border on top short side. Starting on the short side nearest you and using parchment paper to help it keep its shape as you go, roll up dough to form a log. Wrap in parchment, then reserved plastic and twist ends to tighten and seal (this will preserve the log's shape). Freeze 1 hour.

Place racks in upper and lower thirds of oven; preheat to 375°. Whisk egg white in a small bowl. Spread out some sanding sugar on a large sheet of parchment paper. Unwrap dough and lightly brush egg white all over outside of log; roll in sanding sugar to coat. Slice into rounds about ⅜" thick. Place on 2 baking sheets lined with silicone baking mats or parchment paper, spacing 2" apart.

Bake cookies, rotating baking sheets top to bottom and front to back halfway through, until golden brown, 18–20 minutes. Let cool on baking sheets 5 minutes, then carefully transfer to a wire rack with a spatula (if using parchment, jam may stick in spots); let cool completely.

DO AHEAD: Jam can be made 3 days ahead; transfer to an airtight container and chill. Dough can be made 1 week ahead; keep frozen. Thaw overnight in refrigerator before using.

I DIDN’T GROW UP IN A BAKING HOUSEHOLD. As the Asian immigrant lore goes, our oven (and dishwasher, while we’re at it) was, indeed, used primarily for storage. That isn’t to say that we didn’t love baked goods. One of my favorites growing up was the classic black-and-white cookie found in many New York City bakeries and Jewish delis. It was a real treat to pick one up after a museum or gallery trip with my mom. She’d usually go for a date rugelach while I’d beeline to the giant graphic treats, nibbling my way across each flavor and down, being sure to get a balanced mix of both vanilla and chocolate. My preference for a soft cakey cookie can probably be traced back to my love for these. This cookie is a riff on the extra-large New York classic shrunk down to the size of a chubby chocolate chip cookie, featuring refreshing peppermint extract (when in doubt, be stingy) and a sprinkle of festive crushed candy canes. —*Hana Asbrink*

Bake the Cover

Peppermint Black-and-White Cookies

BAKER’S NOTE

For the smoothest, shiniest application, a thick glaze works best—loose enough to spread, but stiff enough to “stand” on its own. Add more water or corn syrup at the end if needed to get to the right consistency. Glazing the white sides first gives them enough time to set before starting on the chocolate.

HANA SAYS

An offset spatula might feel like an overly cheffy restaurant utensil, but its function is multifaceted at home. I use it to smooth out anything that needs leveling (like the glaze on these cookies), as a gentle fork-lift for prying things off a baking sheet, or even to help scrape out the last of the mayo in the jar.

MAKES ABOUT 16

COOKIES

1	cup (125 g) all-purpose flour
½	tsp. baking powder
½	tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¼ tsp. Morton kosher salt
½	cup (100 g) granulated sugar
6	Tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature
1	large egg yolk
⅓	cup sour cream
¼	tsp. peppermint extract

GLAZE AND ASSEMBLY

2	full-size candy canes
3	cups (330 g) powdered sugar
¼	tsp. peppermint extract
3	Tbsp. (or more) light corn syrup, divided
¼	cup Dutch-process cocoa powder (such as Guittard Cocoa Rouge)

COOKIES Place a rack in middle of oven; preheat to 350°. Whisk flour, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl to combine. Using an electric mixer on medium-high speed, beat granulated sugar and butter in a large bowl until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add egg yolk; beat to combine. Add sour cream and peppermint extract; beat again to combine. Add dry ingredients, reduce mixer speed to low, and beat until well combined. Using a rubber spatula, mix until no dry streaks of flour remain.

Using a #40 cookie scoop (about 2 Tbsp.), portion out dough, dividing between 2 baking sheets lined with silicone baking mats (for the smoothest bottoms) or parchment paper, spacing about 2" apart (up to 8 per baking sheet). Working with 1 baking sheet at a time, bake cookies until puffed, matte on top, and golden underneath, 14–16 minutes (check after 12 minutes if using parchment). Let cool on baking sheets 5 minutes. Carefully transfer to a wire rack; let cool completely.

DO AHEAD: Cookies can be baked 1 day ahead. Store airtight at room temperature.

GLAZE AND ASSEMBLY Place candy canes in a resealable plastic bag. Seal and lightly crush candy into small pieces with a rolling pin or skillet (try not to overdo it or you’ll end up with powder). Set aside.

Stir powdered sugar, peppermint extract, 2 Tbsp. corn syrup, and 2 Tbsp. water in a small bowl until smooth (glaze should be very thick but fluid; add more water 1 tsp. at a time up to 1 Tbsp. to loosen or drizzle in more corn syrup as needed to thicken). Pour half of glaze into another small bowl. Add cocoa powder, remaining 1 Tbsp. corn syrup, and 1 Tbsp. water; stir, adding more water 1 tsp. at a time if needed, until cocoa powder is dissolved and glaze is smooth and thick.

Turn cookies over. Using a small offset spatula, spread one half of each cookie with about ½ tsp. white glaze. Repeat with chocolate glaze on empty half of each cookie.

Immediately, lightly sprinkle one side of each cookie with reserved crushed candy canes (alternate between white and chocolate glaze if desired). Let cookies sit at room temperature until glaze is no longer wet to the touch, 30–45 minutes.

DO AHEAD: Cookies can be made 12 hours ahead. Store airtight at room temperature.

WHILE THE WEATHER MAY BE (IN)FAMOUSLY TEMPERATE, you can almost always tell what season it is in Southern California by the produce at the markets. Come the shorter, if not much colder, days of winter, stacks of local citrus are everywhere. And yet, every year while I was growing up, my grandfather was sure to send a generous gift box of softball-size ruby red grapefruits nestled alongside navel oranges, seedless mandarins, and bags of Key limes straight from Florida to my family in Santa Monica. A handful of the oranges would be sure to find homes in the toes of our stockings hung by the fireplace. Grapefruits were sliced open and served under thick layers of crunchy granulated sugar. And Key limes? They were most certainly destined for pies. While these cookies invert the classic ratio of crust to custardy filling (these are for you, crust lovers), they're an affectionate homage to the dessert I associate most with the holiday season, and my lovingly stubborn grandpa. Blitzed graham crackers and all-purpose flour come together in a buttery, brown-sugar-sweetened dough that stays soft and chewy after baking. In the center of each thumbprint, a dollop of silky, tart lime filling sets during the cookies' brief stint in the oven, just like their full-size namesake. *—Kelsey Jane Youngman*

Key Lime Pie Thumbprint Cookies

MAKES ABOUT 14

COOKIES

9 graham cracker sheets (about 5 oz.; 1 sleeve)
¾ cup plus 1 Tbsp. (101 g) all-purpose flour
1¼ tsp. Diamond Crystal or ¾ tsp. Morton kosher salt
½ cup (packed; 100 g) light brown sugar
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 large egg
½ tsp. vanilla extract
¼ cup (50 g) granulated sugar

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY

1 large egg yolk
⅓ cup sweetened condensed milk
4 tsp. finely grated lime zest, plus more for serving
2 Tbsp. plus 1½ tsp. fresh lime juice

COOKIES Place racks in upper and lower thirds of oven and preheat to 350°. Pulse graham crackers in a food processor until sandy crumbs form. Add flour and salt; pulse to combine. Transfer to a small bowl.

Pulse brown sugar and butter in processor until creamy. Add egg and vanilla and pulse just to combine. Add graham cracker mixture and process until dough comes together and forms a ball, about 45 seconds.

Place granulated sugar in a clean small bowl. Using a #40 cookie scoop (about 2 Tbsp.), portion out dough; roll into smooth balls (dough will be sticky). Working one at a time, toss balls in granulated sugar to coat generously. Divide between 2 parchment-lined baking sheets, spacing at least 2" apart (about 7 per sheet). Working one at a time, dip the bottom of a shot glass or ⅛-cup measuring cup into remaining granulated sugar, then press down in center of balls to create a divot that can hold 2 tsp. filling, about ¼" deep (for the first cookie, press glass into it a little before dipping into sugar; it will easily adhere to glass from thereafter). Chill cookies in freezer 15 minutes.

FILLING AND ASSEMBLY While cookies are chilling, whisk egg yolk and condensed milk in a small bowl to combine. Add lime juice and 4 tsp. lime zest; whisk until slightly thickened.

Remove cookies from freezer and spoon about 2 tsp. filling into each divot (don't overfill). Bake cookies, rotating baking sheets top to bottom and front to back halfway through, until filling is set and cookies are firm and golden brown around the edges, 12–14 minutes. Let cookies cool on baking sheets 5 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely.

Just before serving, finely grate a little lime zest over each cookie.

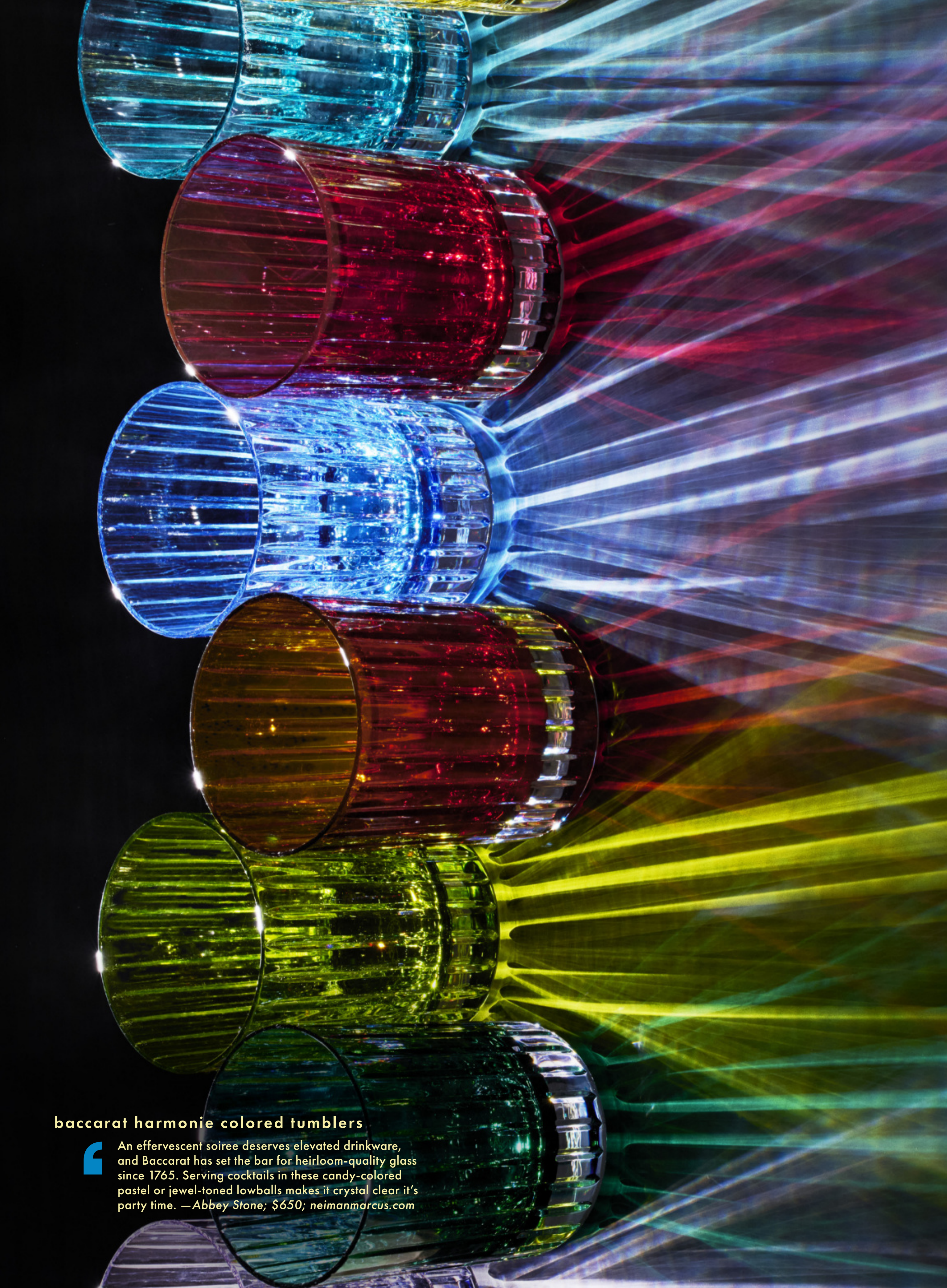
DO AHEAD: Cookies (without lime zest) can be baked 1 day ahead. Store airtight in a single layer at room temperature.

KELSEY JANE SAYS

Yes, I've cheated here and used regular limes. Real Key limes will lend an extra sour tang and more complex floral citrus aroma to your cookies, but they're admittedly fussier to zest and juice than the standard variety. You'll need about 10 Key limes to make the filling, which you can find at sayweee.com (starting at $3 per pound), or your local grocery store. I don't recommend bottled Key lime juice (it's often rather astringent).

BAKER'S NOTE

Chilling the shaped cookies in the freezer before filling is a crucial step as it keeps the butter-rich dough from spreading too much when baking. Plus, it gives you just the right amount of time to whisk up the filling so it's perfectly thickened, making it easy to portion. Because of its concentrated, toasty flavor, Heilala x Bon Appétit Double Fold Vanilla (paste, $30 for a 2.29-oz. jar, or extract, $27 for a 1.69-oz. bottle; heilalavanilla.com) is our favorite to bake with.



baccarat harmonie colored tumblers

An effervescent soiree deserves elevated drinkware, and Baccarat has set the bar for heirloom-quality glass since 1765. Serving cocktails in these candy-colored pastel or jewel-toned lowballs makes it crystal clear it's party time. —*Abbey Stone; $650; neimanmarcus.com*

SWANKY, SNAZZY, COZY, COVETABLE, GIFTS FOR MERRYMAKING

by the bon appétit staff

prop styling by erica lutz

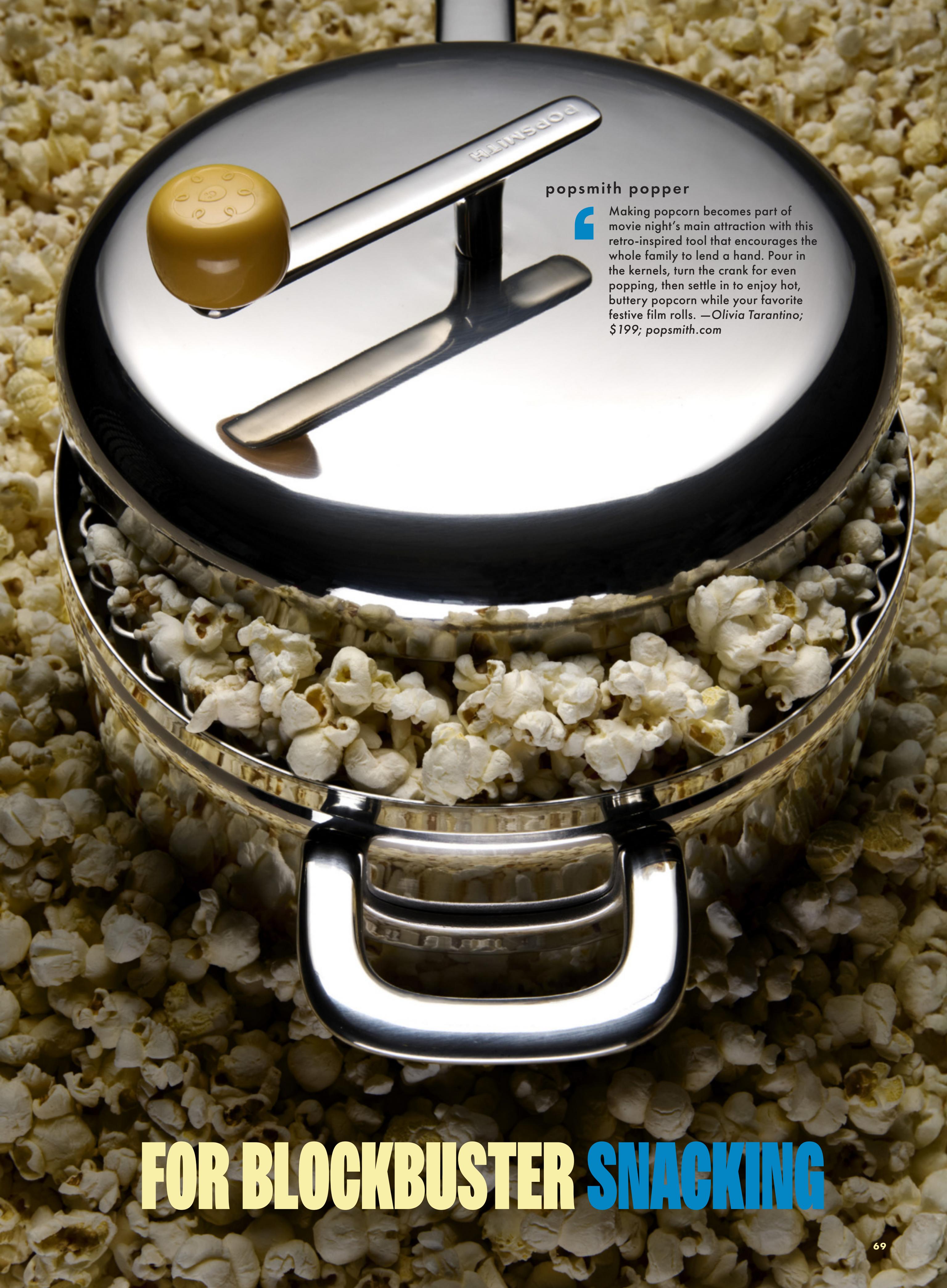
photographs by marcus mcdonald

The holidays are all about gathering with loved ones. Make the moments you share even merrier by letting your social calendar guide your gifting. From timeless tableware for the ultimate dinner party to toast-worthy, special-occasion glasses, our favorite picks for presents are better enjoyed together.

FOR UPPING THE ANTE ON GAME NIGHT

frank lloyd wright playing cards

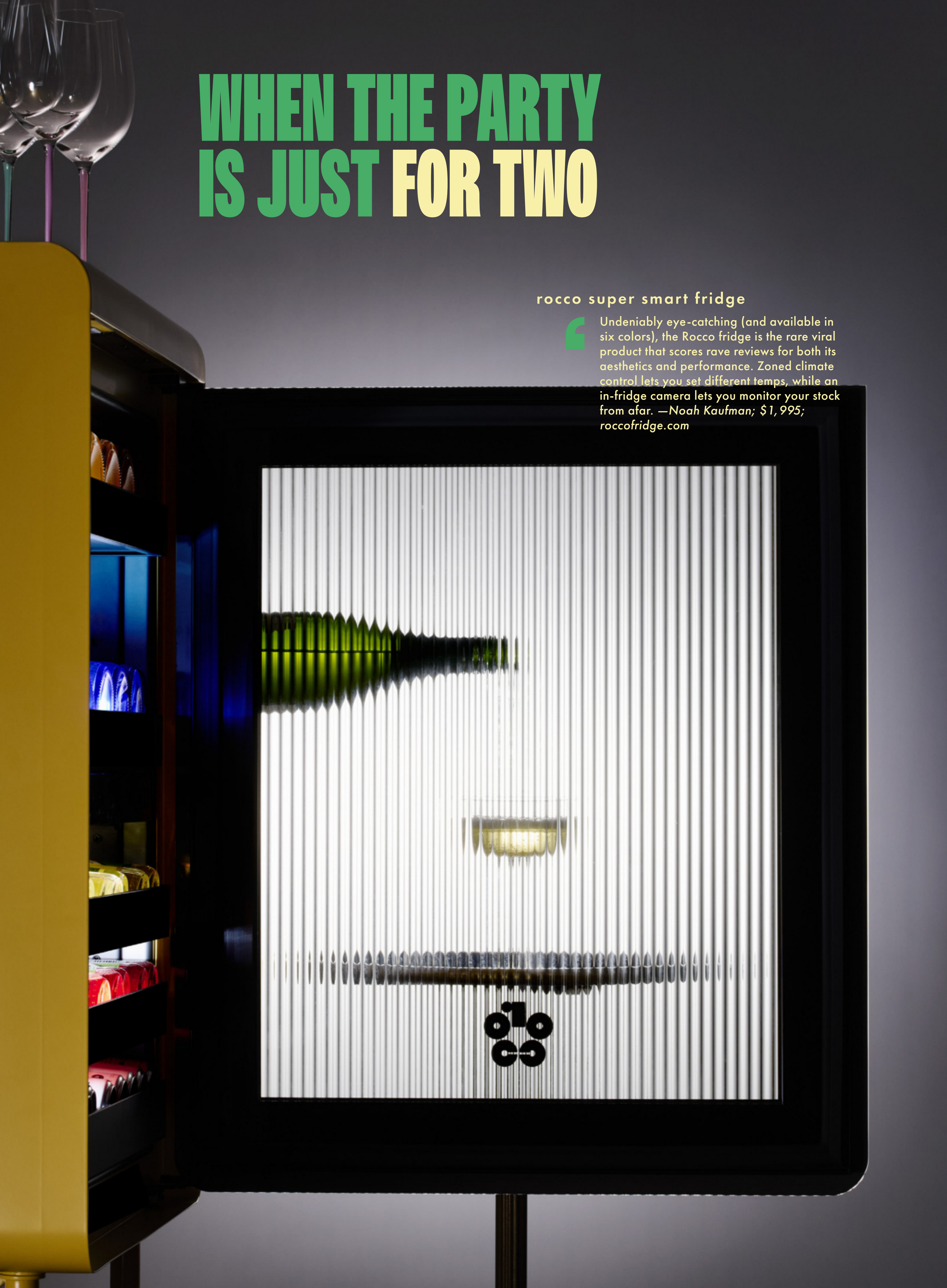
Earn a standing invitation to game night by gifting your host these playing cards featuring the iconic architect's geometric illustrations. When you've collected your poker winnings or completed your (prairie) house of cards, stow the decks in their box that's stylish enough to put on display and small enough to slip into a stocking. *—Emily Farris; $17; galison.com*



FOR BLOCKBUSTER SNACKING

popsmith popper

Making popcorn becomes part of movie night's main attraction with this retro-inspired tool that encourages the whole family to lend a hand. Pour in the kernels, turn the crank for even popping, then settle in to enjoy hot, buttery popcorn while your favorite festive film rolls. —*Olivia Tarantino; $199; popsmith.com*



WHEN THE PARTY IS JUST FOR TWO

rocco super smart fridge

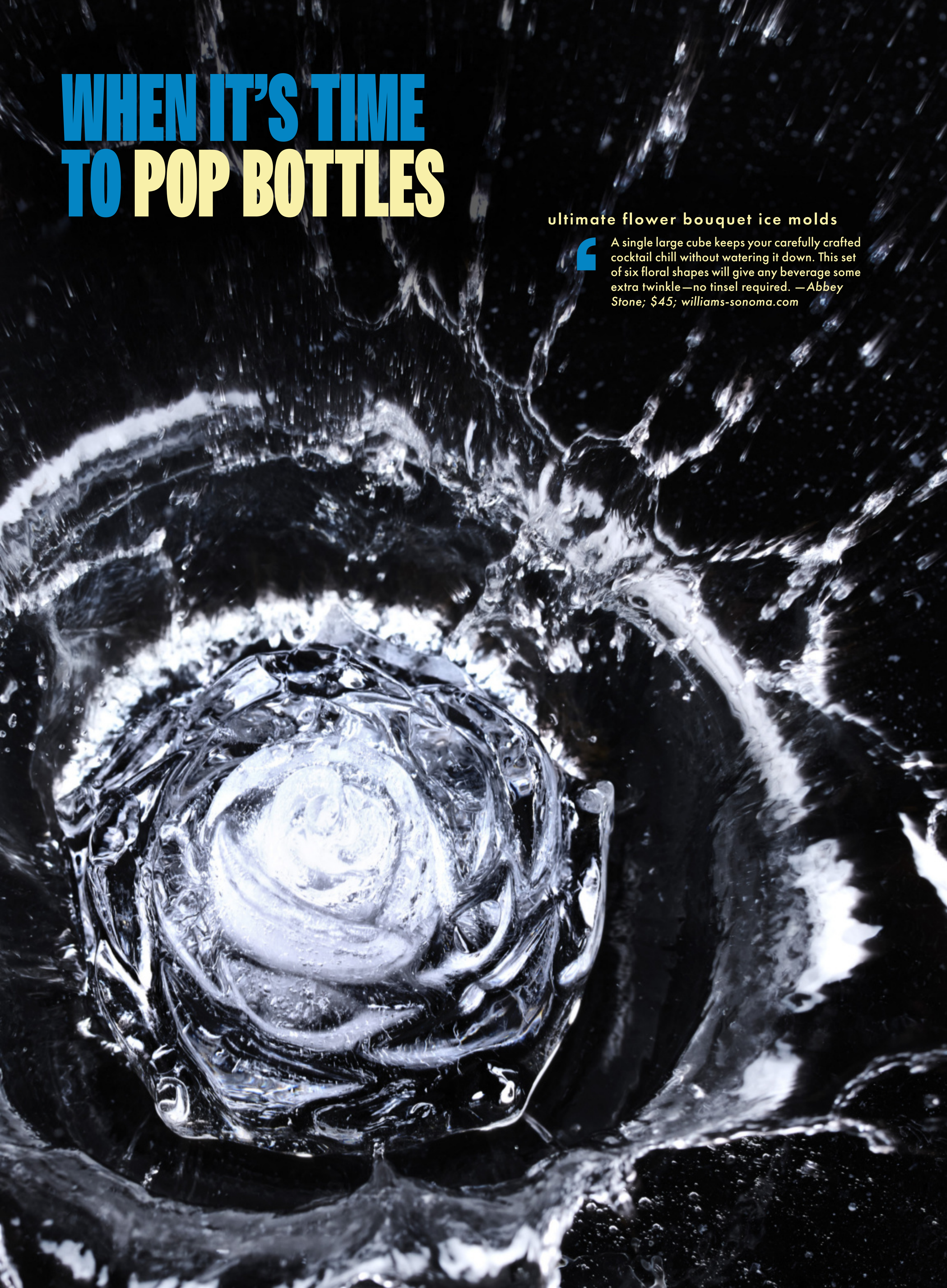
Undeniably eye-catching (and available in six colors), the Rocco fridge is the rare viral product that scores rave reviews for both its aesthetics and performance. Zoned climate control lets you set different temps, while an in-fridge camera lets you monitor your stock from afar. *—Noah Kaufman; $1,995; roccofridge.com*

heath x herman miller dinnerware set

A collaboration between two famed design companies, this timeless dinnerware collection is available in nine elegant, soothing colors—think a pesto-hued green and cherry blossom pink. Among those pieces you'll find stackable candleholders and serving plates, so you can mix and match to your heart's content. *—Alaina Chou; Prices vary; heathceramics.com*

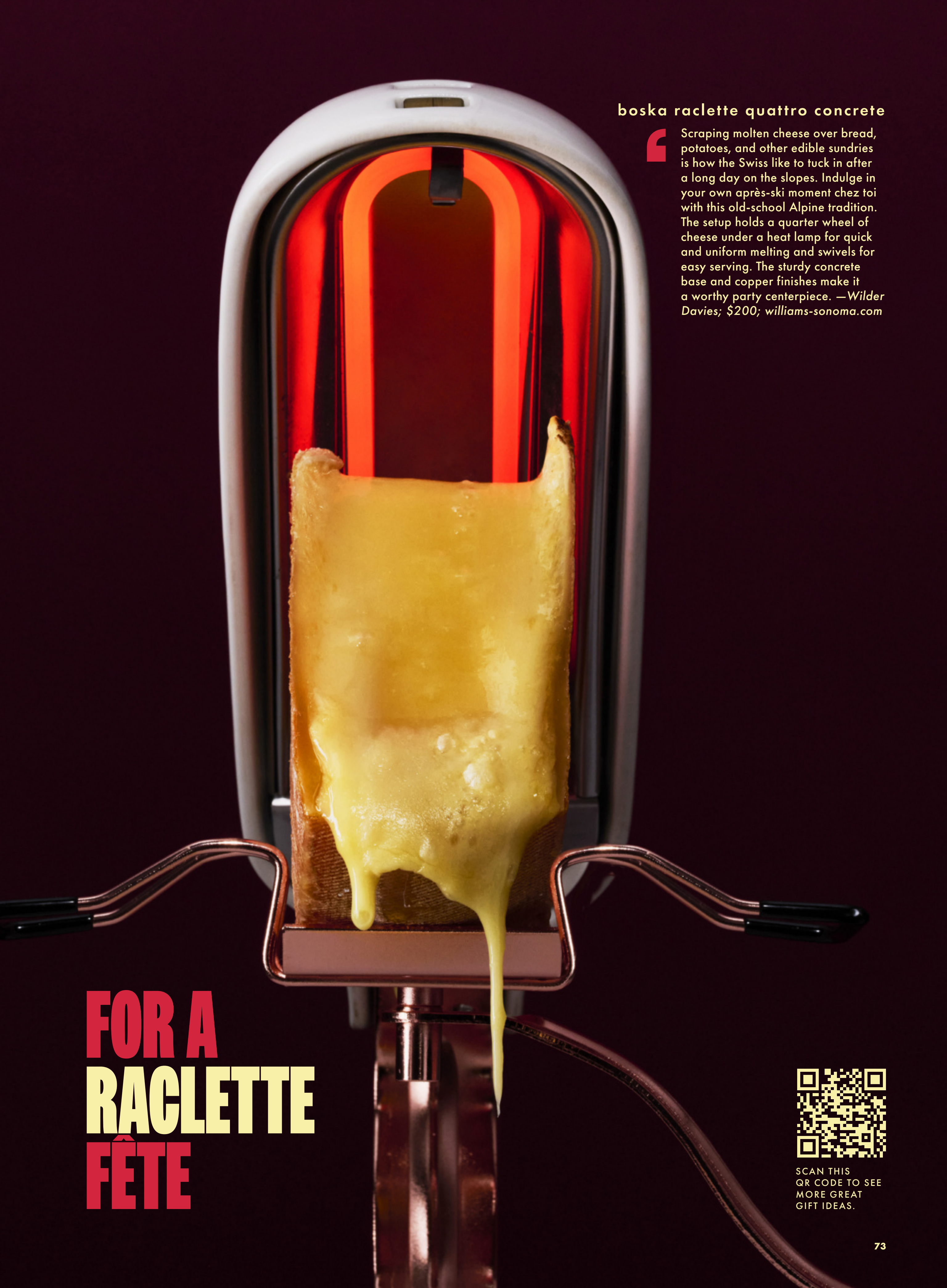
WHEN MEMORY-MAKING IS ON THE MENU

WHEN IT'S TIME TO POP BOTTLES



ultimate flower bouquet ice molds

A single large cube keeps your carefully crafted cocktail chill without watering it down. This set of six floral shapes will give any beverage some extra twinkle—no tinsel required. —*Abbey Stone; $45; williams-sonoma.com*



FOR A RACLETTE FÊTE

boska raclette quattro concrete

Scraping molten cheese over bread, potatoes, and other edible sundries is how the Swiss like to tuck in after a long day on the slopes. Indulge in your own après-ski moment chez toi with this old-school Alpine tradition. The setup holds a quarter wheel of cheese under a heat lamp for quick and uniform melting and swivels for easy serving. The sturdy concrete base and copper finishes make it a worthy party centerpiece. —*Wilder Davies; $200; williams-sonoma.com*

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO SEE MORE GREAT GIFT IDEAS.

THE BOOKS THAT CHANGED THE WAY WE COOK

UMMA
THE KING COOKBOOK
Dinner
Meera Sodha

BY THE TEST
KITCHEN EDITORS

ILLUSTRATED
BY TIM ENTHOVEN

IN 2025 THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF STELLAR COOKBOOKS, BUT A SELECT FEW LEFT A LASTING IMPACT ON BA'S TEST KITCHEN EDITORS, OFFERING EYE-OPENING MOMENTS AND INSPIRING NEW WAYS TO APPROACH COOKING THIS YEAR AND FOR MANY MORE YEARS TO COME

SUGAR · MSG
Third Culture Cooking
Classic Recipes for a New Generation

Dear Reader,

For Bon Appétit's food editors, the holidays roll around when the heat of summer still roils the sidewalks outside the Test Kitchen. It's an incongruous time for winter recipe planning to reach its buttery peak. The smell of our extraordinary spread of holiday cookies (page 52) had barely faded when we gathered to reflect on our year in cooking. A lot of what we learned was from each other, as twice a day the Test Kitchen staff gathers to taste the recipes in development. Everyone is expected to offer critical feedback, evaluating each dish on its construction, flavor, appearance, and the delight it inspires. "Good enough" doesn't cut it.

We are also constantly absorbing the wisdom of other chefs, particularly through their cookbooks. This year there were so many phenomenal new works that brought fresh ideas into our own kitchens, tackled culinary problems in novel ways, and offered unexpected perspectives.

In true Test Kitchen form, however, we weren't content to just ship you off with a few recommendations that seem promising. We picked a short list of cookbooks from our favorite authors published in 2025 and put their recipes through the same process as every other one we touch.

We tasted, we debated, and in the end, these five standouts went beyond just impressing us at work; they actually changed the way we cook at home as well. Here's a look into that process, with results that we hope will be just as transformational for you.

Sincerely,
Chris Morocco
Food Director

INÉS'S PICK

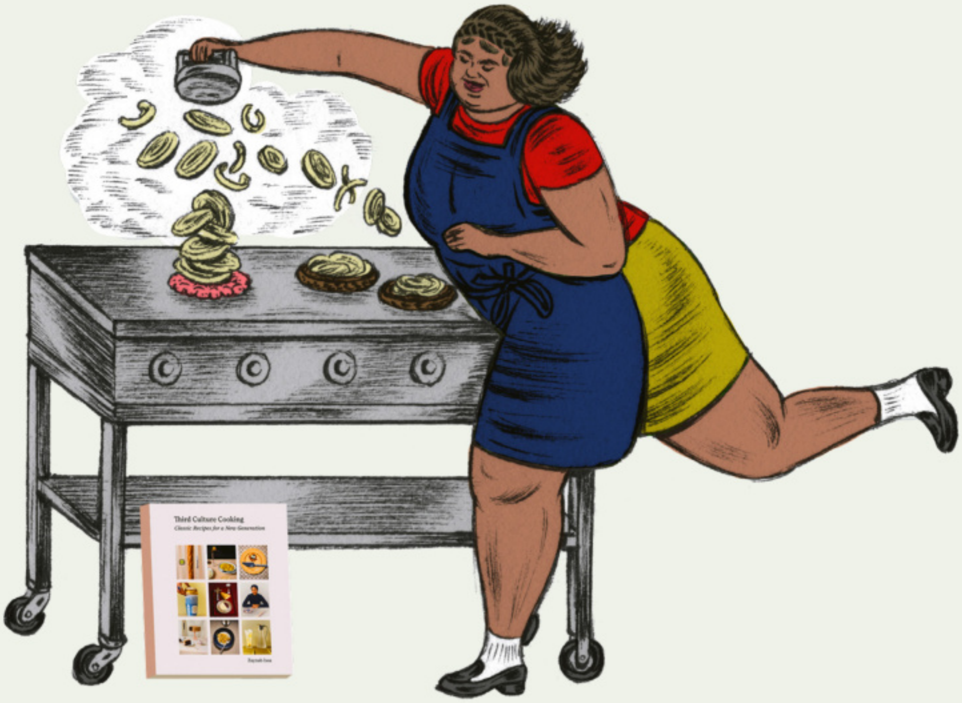
THIRD CULTURE COOKING

BY ZAYNAB ISSA

ABOUT THE BOOK
An empowering collection of everyday recipes and techniques that incorporate an array of cultural traditions with generosity and ingenuity.

THE DISH
Samosa-Spiced Burgers

AHA MOMENT
This recipe combines Oklahoma-style smash burgers (featuring onions frizzled in beef fat) with samosa flavors (like chile, garam masala, and mint), no spice-toasting required. It's one of many smart combinations in the book that has shown me how I can incorporate impactful flavor in my own low-lift ways. Chorizo chili hot dogs leaning on Mexican oregano and cilantro or curry chicken pasta salad—punchy explorations to foster connections that bring me closer to my version of home.


Third Culture Cooking
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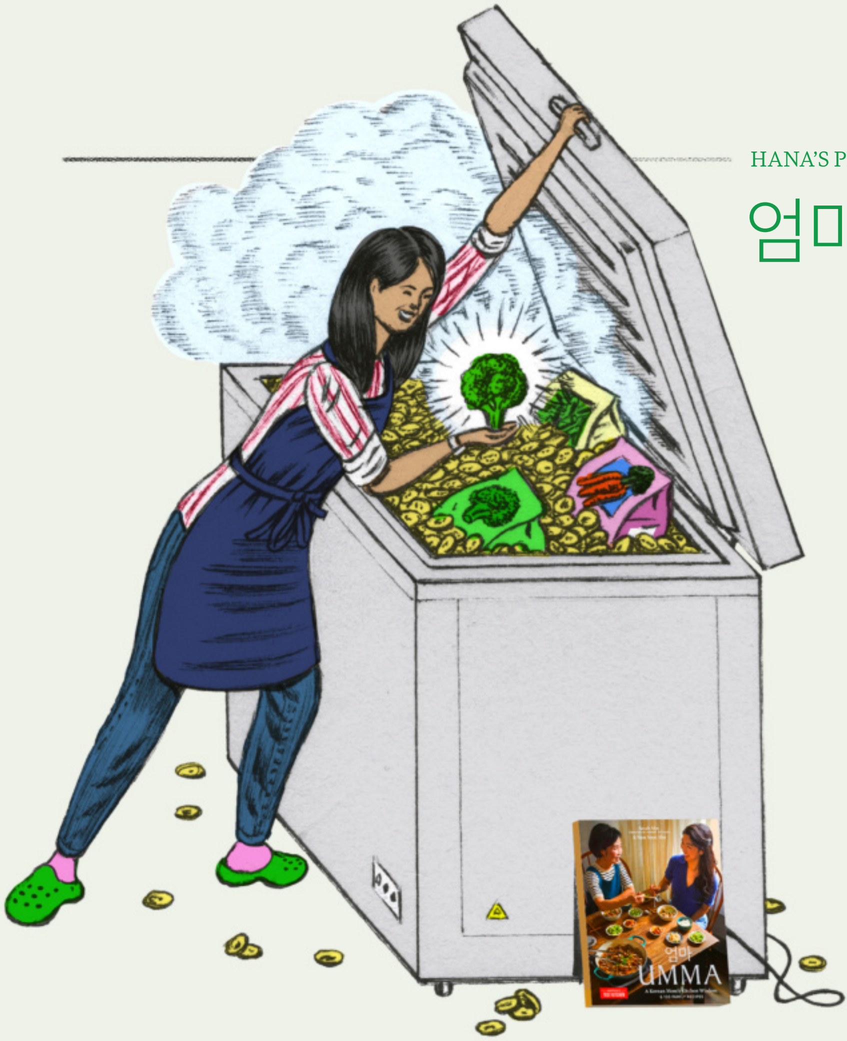


HANA'S PICK

엄마 UMMA

BY SARAH AHN, NAM SOON AHN,
AND AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

ABOUT THE BOOK
Chock-full of homegrown mom (or umma) wisdom, abundant in clever tips for cooking, prepping, shopping, storing, and relishing Korean dishes.

THE DISH
Broccoli Dubu Muchim

AHA MOMENT
Using frozen broccoli in place of fresh florets is revelatory in making this classic Korean side dish. It's not rocket science to use thawed produce, but it is untraditional when it comes to banchan.

For a cuisine with lots of steps, this tip felt like a radical shortcut, given with motherly permission. The next time my produce drawer is looking bleak, I'll give new eyes to the freezer: spinach for Japanese goma-ae; corn for a lightly dressed lunch box salad; peas folded directly into just-cooked rice to maintain their vibrant green hue.

SALT · SUGAR · MSG

CHRIS'S PICK

SALT SUGAR MSG

BY CALVIN ENG
AND PHOEBE MELNICK

ABOUT THE BOOK

An exploration of Cantonese American dishes and how a simple pantry ingredient can transform how we think about, and approach, the way we cook.

THE DISH

Hong Kong Egg Scramble

AHA MOMENT

Adding a pinch of MSG makes this silky-smooth scramble taste richer and more eggy than usual. It spurred me to question why I don't use the staple more often in my own kitchen. Eng and Melnick's book is filled with ideas that inspire me to think beyond salt, fat, and acid as the building blocks of flavor. Now I'm seeking more explicit umami in my dressings and sauces, making it easier to boost plant-based dishes in particular.

JESSE'S PICK

DINNER

BY MEERA SODHA

ABOUT THE BOOK

Fast, easy meals for jaded cooks that will reawaken how we think about, and eat, vegetables.

THE DISH

Tandoori Cauliflower With Cilantro and Cashew Sauce

AHA MOMENT

Tossing cauliflower with yogurt and spices before roasting allows for the spices to infuse the veg without burning and leaves a perfectly charred golden exterior akin to a tandoori marinade. Prior to learning this technique, I would strictly use oil to brown my roasted veggies. Now I have another method that results in a delightfully textured crust.

Dinner
Meera Sodha

THE KING COOKBOOK

SHILPA'S PICK

THE KING COOKBOOK

BY ANNIE SHI, CLARE DE BOER,
JESS SHADBOLT, AND KITTY GREENWALD

ABOUT THE BOOK

A book of quiet confidence that eschews trends, celebrating the pleasure of simple, satisfying food.

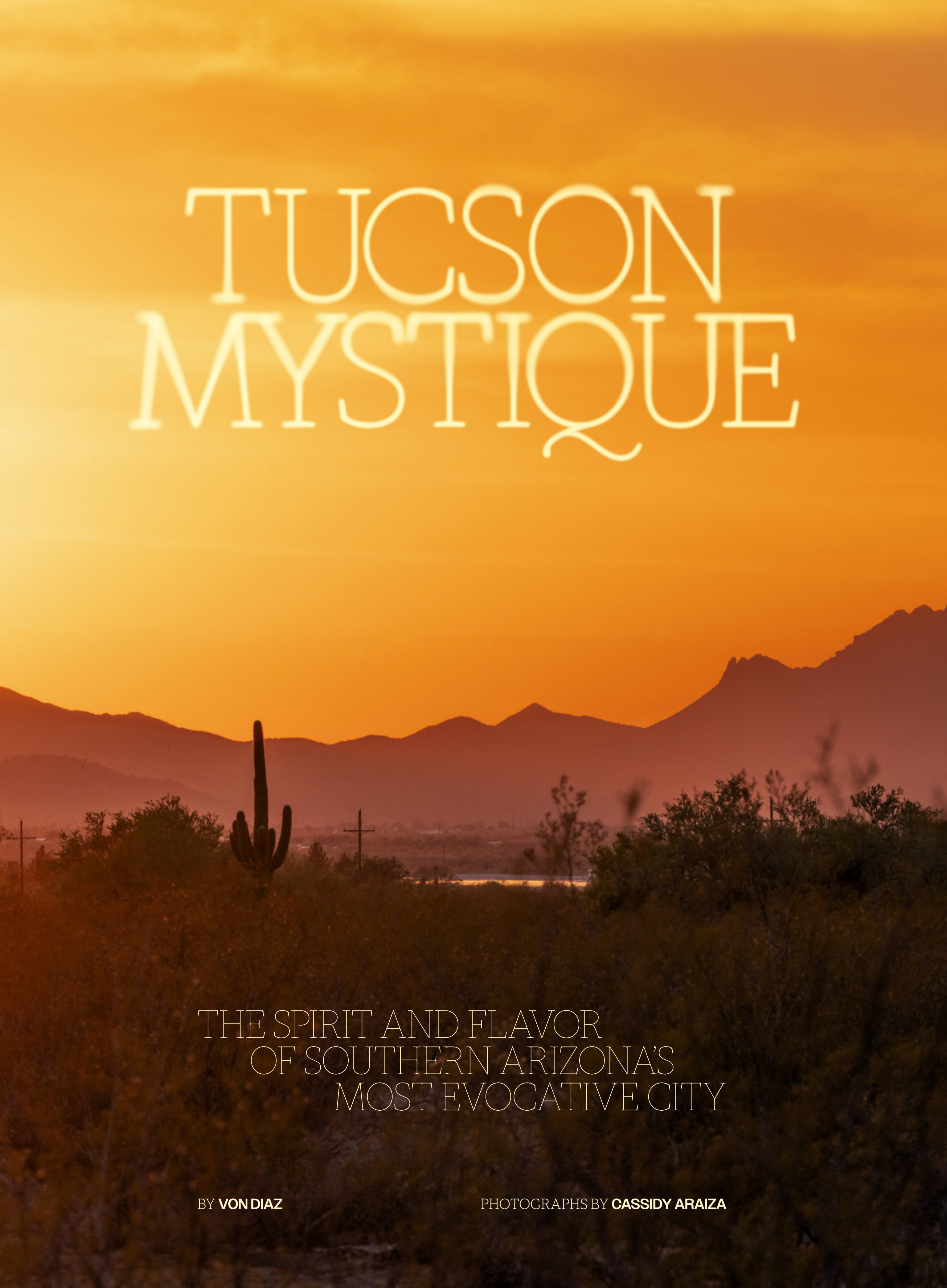
THE DISH

Far Breton

AHA MOMENT

This Far Breton reminded me that some desserts can be compelling without any fuss. The adaptable flan-like base invites us to add whatever dried fruits we have on hand (in this case, prunes). Meaning sometimes it's okay to use what you've got; not every dessert has to be a production.

The last time I hosted friends, I served store-bought ice cream already in the freezer with a quick, sumptuous chocolate sauce and pantry staples. No fuss. Because simple can still end up a moreish delight.



TUCSON MYSTIQUE

THE SPIRIT AND FLAVOR OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA'S MOST EVOCATIVE CITY

BY **VON DIAZ**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **CASSIDY ARAIZA**

LEFT: MORNING VISTAS AT SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK.
ABOVE: JACKFRUIT TAMALES, CHILES RELLENOS, AND MORE OF TUMERICO'S GREATEST HITS.

INTO THE DESERT

The desert has a certain draw. The extreme heat, extensive periods of drought, and seemingly endless dry, dusty expanses peppered with spiky plants form a landscape that is seductive and romantic. Those same extremes push your body to the limit in ways that clear the mind and pull what's most important to the surface. Shelter, water, survival, certainly. One might assume that such an austere landscape wouldn't yield much vitality, but that couldn't be further from the truth. There is a profound appreciation for simple pleasures: a sudden rain shower, vermilion blossoms springing out of an otherwise sand and sage green terrain, or ducking into a watering hole for an ice-cold drink, a glass beaded with condensation that you press against your forehead. The world's most pungent herbs and spices come from desert landscapes, as plants concentrate the chemical compounds that increase flavor intensity into leaves and seeds in order to withstand arid conditions. The sunsets are spectacular due to these same conditions—light reflecting off mountains, dust particles, and high wispy clouds. The landscape's extremities throw everything into sharp relief, and if you're brave and resilient enough to tolerate it, the desert rewards you with a bounty of experiences and flavors.

I come from a different kind of heat. My island home, Puerto Rico, and my southern home, Atlanta, are both places that are known for it. But theirs is a juicy heat, a suffocating humidity so thick you swear you could slice through it. It also cultivates lushness and fresh, lively cuisines. I must like it hot because I keep traveling to and studying some of the hottest places on earth. And Tucson, Arizona, is a town that unexpectedly won my heart. The iconic saguaros, those many-armed desert sentinels, haunt my dreams, as do local dishes redolent with mesquite smoke complemented by the dank smokiness of agave spirits like mezcal and bacanora. Tucson's mystique drew me back this year on a journey that revealed more of its magic and how its seeming austerity masks an abundance and way of life that reveals solutions for living well in an increasingly hot world.

THE DESERT IS THE FUTURE

It's Sunday, 7:30 a.m. I drive down the Patagonia-Sonoita scenic road to meet Gary Paul Nabhan, a friend and mentor and among one of the foremost experts on desert terroir, to harvest prickly pear, a decades-long practice for Nabhan. He's of Lebanese descent but grew up in Gary, Indiana. He moved to Arizona 51 years ago to work with a number of nonprofits and indigenous food projects before becoming a research scientist at the University of Arizona. Now retired, he is the author of more than 20 books on desert terroir ranging from ethnobotany to agave spirits, and today he travels the globe as a desert evangelist with one key message: The desert is the future.

I had repeatedly requested a specific address or pin for us to meet, but the best I got is a pull-off between two mile markers on a road that seems to have several different names and numbers. The meeting place looks much like any other expanse of road in the Sonoran desert, dusty taupe with various cacti and mesquite trees. At a distance many of these plants appear fluffy, with a bushiness that upon closer inspection reveals hundreds, likely thousands, of prickly spines. As we walk a little farther off the roadside, the bounty is revealed. Crowns of prickly pear adorn the tops of the same-named cacti, which range from waist to chest high, begging to be plucked. Nabhan is ready with tongs and baskets, but my inexperience gets the better of me, and like Sleeping Beauty drawn to the spindle, I'm hypnotized by the fruit and pluck one with my fingers. I quickly find it's covered in imperceivable bristles. Lesson learned, I turn to tongs, looking for the ones with the deepest color, easily pulling the fruit—known locally as tuna—from the cactus pad, revealing its astounding magenta flesh. After scraping the spines from the surface, I taste one straight from the plant, which fills my mouth with extraordinarily sweet, thick, syrupy juice.

As with so many things in the desert, prickly pear season is a marker of time, arriving near the end of monsoon season (about late June to mid-September) when the area receives most of its annual rainfall. And so desert dwellers must make hay, harvesting and enjoying the fruit fresh or juicing and preserving them. This is the first stop on a full day with Nabhan. I first learned about his work 10 years ago, when Tucson was designated a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, a project he spearheaded with anthropologist Jonathan Mabry, making it one of two cities in the United States internationally recognized for its food heritage and cuisine at this scale.

Next we visit an area near his home in Patagonia to harvest amaranth greens, known locally as quelites. These innocuous greens look like weeds but taste better than spinach. Nabhan has harvested many meals worth of salads and ingredients for spanakopita—a nod to his Mediterranean Lebanese heritage—each week from this same patch. From there we head up a fairly steep rocky road to the home he

AUTHOR AND ETHNOBOTANIST **GARY NABHAN** HARVESTS PEAK-SEASON PRICKLY PEAR.

CUKṢOÑ

CHEF-OWNER **WENDY GARCIA** PAUSES AMID THE HUM OF RUNNING TWO RESTAURANTS. **OPPOSITE:** TUMERICO'S HUITLACOCHE AND FLOR DE CALABAZA TACOS.

shares with his wife, Laurie Monti, a cultural ecologist with extensive knowledge of plant medicine, and a focus on Indigenous community health on both sides of the border wall. Trees leading up to their house bow with ripe pomegranates, and the air smells of herbs warming in the sun. He has cultivated 150 different kinds of desert plants in this garden—creating a resilient and self-sustaining ecosystem of desert offerings.

Nabhan is as committed to what he calls "conservation we can taste" as he is to a kind of Sonoran futurism that looks to the resilience of the desert in order to predict the world's changing agricultural needs. Although his knowledge spans millennia, having studied and built community with Native peoples throughout the region and in other parts of the world, he very much lives in the present, seeing boundless opportunity in an environment that can sustain so much life amid austerity. "It's about fomenting innovation," he said.

DESERT HUNGER. DESERT ABUNDANCE

Tucson is in Sonora, a region that stretches beyond the so-named northern Mexican state to include southern Arizona, up to the Grand Canyon, parts of southeastern California, and the Baja Peninsula. Walls may slow the flow of people, but not nature. The majority of the planet's biomes, or climate regions, are represented here, and Arizona is the only state to house all four of the nation's deserts.

It's perhaps no surprise then that the Sonoran palate is toasty: mesquite smoke, chiltepín chiles, grilled cactus pads, piquant minty oregano, and rich, nutty tepary beans. These flavors spring from native plants that have survived and thrived in this environment for thousands of years and appear far beyond the Mexican restaurants where you might expect them to include a locally made award-winning mesquite-infused spirt—Whiskey Del Bac—as well as pastas, pizzas, sandwiches, and lattes.

Mesquite trees sprout up in seemingly every corner of Tucson. Mesquite shrublands flank the highways, and saplings grow out of sidewalks, their sage, fern-like leaves softening the landscape. They are undoubtedly the most prominent flavor in Sonoran cuisine. When burned, the wood produces a rich, aromatic smoke due to high lignin levels, which imparts a more intense flavor than oak or hickory, with earthy cumin undertones and a mild sweetness. These trees also produce copious beans: sweet pale green seed pods that dangle from the branches and can be eaten fresh or dried and ground into powders. Like prickly pear, mesquite beans spring up during the hottest time of year and store well, making them a critical food for preserving life. Taste can vary, but they're often described as having a sweet vanilla or cinnamon flavor.

To mirror the hot sun, the hot chile flavor of Sonora is the native chiltepín. It's known as la madre de todos los chiles, or the mother of all peppers, because all capsicum can trace their genetic origins to this one tiny pepper. Slightly larger than a peppercorn, these chiles grow on bushes and are bright green, then red, and are often sun-dried once harvested. They're fiery, though much like this environment, they're initially intense and biting, then dissipate and don't linger on the palate.

Nopales, the iconic pads of the prickly pear cactus, feature prominently in Sonoran cuisine and are prepared and enjoyed in a number of ways, including raw; blended into smoothies; boiled and chopped and added to soups, stews, or salads; or grilled whole and served like a vegetarian steak. The spines must be carefully removed, and they emit a liquid similar to okra, but a little practice turns this desert plant into an incredibly versatile and nourishing ingredient. And then there are tepary beans; similar in shape to crowder peas in white, brown, or speckled colors, they are rich and creamy. The lighter color is similar in flavor to navy beans while the darker ones have an earthy taste closer to lentils. White Sonoran wheat—derived from an ancient grain as old as 6,500 BCE and brought to the region by Spanish colonizers—is also primed for desert landscapes. It's the key ingredient in the development of the region's unique wheat tortillas, distinct from more typical flour or corn tortillas in their mildly nutty flavor and the way they crisp up when heated on a griddle.

Tucson is cattle country, so you'll also encounter beef in various forms such as stewed into birria, as well as carne seca (also called carne machaca) or dried meat. This style of beef is dried using a variety of methods, then reconstituted before it's added to dishes. But pork, particularly smoked pork in the form of bacon or twice-cooked carnitas, abound, a nod to Spanish

FIELDS OF TEPARY BEANS AT RAMONA FARMS IN SACATON, ARIZONA.

TUCSON IS THE BORDERLANDS, AND THE PEOPLE HERE ARE LONG ACCUSTOMED TO ROAMING TRAVELERS STOPPING THROUGH.

colonial history, as well as a flavor profile that melds perfectly with the copious ingredients sourced from native plants.

I encounter these vibrant, intense flavors everywhere. Mexican food is predictably the most prevalent cuisine represented, though with Sonoran touches. Local favorite El Torero makes crisps: huge wheat tortillas toasted, then topped with green chiles, carne seca, cheese, salsa, and guacamole, like a Mexican pizza. At El Güero Canelo Restaurant or the food truck Ruiz Hot Dogs Los Chipilones, you'll find the iconic Sonoran hot dog: a bacon-wrapped dog topped with beans, chopped green chile, cheese, and crema and served with a whole roasted chile on the side. At Amelia's Mexican Kitchen, the region's signature molcajete—a dish of meat or seafood cooked inside a large stone mortar typically used for making salsas and grinding spices—is served alongside mini chimichangas, which were possibly invented in Tucson at one of the oldest family-run Mexican restaurants in the country, El Charro Café. Among some of the most popular non-Mexican restaurants, Italian restaurant Zio Peppe makes calamarrones—fried calamari combined with chicharrones served over salsa macha with preserved orange. And in the summer Tito & Pep serves a hamachi aguachile with mesquite-smoked cantaloupe.

TUCSON'S GARDEN OASIS

But perhaps the most beloved and fitting representation of the regional palate is the vegetarian restaurant Tumerico. Topping Yelp's list of best restaurants in the nation in 2024, it springs from the soul of a Sonoran native. Chef Wendy Garcia grew up on the other side of the border wall in the Mexican state of Sonora. She's the oldest of four children and was raised in an eating family. Her father was the family's head chef, and he often prepared as many as five meals a day simply because he loved to cook. Or perhaps because both he and his wife were

THE OWLS CLUB FILLS UP WITH PATRONS READY FOR A NIGHT OF SIPS AND GOOD CONVERSATION.

one of more than 10 children in their own families, struggling with poverty and having enough food. The meals of childhood were Sonoran staples: eggs and carne seca for breakfast (one of Garcia's jobs was swatting flies away from slabs of meat as they dried in the sun), little meatballs made of chicken, beef, or venison (that her father would hunt); fried taquitos; and rice and beans, all served with plenty of fresh salsas or guacamole. She learned to make all of these dishes as a child. "My dad cooked. I'm the oldest, so I was his assistant. But I hated it," she recalls. For her it was just work, and she would rather have been playing.

When Garcia was 16, her father, Carlos, died. They were extremely close, and Garcia struggled to cope. Her mom sent her to Tucson to find her way, which she did—straight into the kitchen. She worked on the line for a number of years and, like many chefs, reached a point of burnout. She struggled with her health, which led her to develop an Ashtanga yoga practice and adopt a plant-based diet. Pulled back to cooking, she started making vegan tamales stuffed with her now signature jackfruit carnitas and selling them at farmers markets in Tucson. Those tamales became so popular that she decided to open Tumerico in 2016 as a love letter to the Sonoran flavors and homestyle dishes she grew up with, but with an intentional emphasis on soul-nourishing dishes with clean flavors that accentuate the quality of the locally sourced native ingredients at the center of her culinary approach.

Wendy Garcia's energy is explosive. She's petite in stature but walks into the room with confidence and determination. A quintessential *chingona*—the reclaimed Mexican term for a fierce, powerful, and intelligent woman. For years Tumerico has topped the ratings charts, rather shockingly for a largely vegan restaurant situated in cattle country. But once you eat there, it's easy to see why it's beloved. Garcia is often there, and if she sees one of her regulars from inside the kitchen or out in the dining room, she has a ready embrace. On the day I'm there, she leads her entire kitchen out to the dining room to sing "Happy Birthday" to an elderly man named Ramon.

Tumerico's menu—which changes daily based on what's on hand—feels like a warm hug for the body. It's anchored by those same signature jackfruit carnitas tamales with fresh salsa, and chile relleno stuffed with creamy mozzarella served with vegetable turmeric rice and refried beans. Native tepary beans are cooked perfectly al dente with carrots and nopales and garnished with red chile sauce and salsa verde. Huitlacoche, a fungal delicacy that grows on corn (also known as corn smut), shows up on tacos and other dishes, as does flor de calabaza, or squash blossoms. And the refreshments have the same sumptuous yet nutritive vibe: hibiscus agua fresca, turmeric lemonade, prickly pear horchata, and mesquite lattes.

These dishes are all based on Garcia's heritage and upbringing but are fundamentally an expression of love, her gift to the eater. Cooking is how she shows affection, how she cares for others. And it's important to her. On another day we meet at her newer project, La Chaiteria, which serves meat in addition to her signature vegan and vegetarian offerings. I arrive on time, but she looks at me like I'm late. "Come, I've been cooking for you!" That wasn't the plan, actually. We were going to sit and get to know each other. But I learned that Garcia doesn't really sit. She's always in motion, checking the restaurant, the customers, the register, and the kitchen. She asks questions in rapid succession, keeping the cooks on their toes. I'd barely sat in my chair when the first plate lands. A green chicken enchilada topped with red sauce and a fried egg, carnitas and ropa vieja tacos, a gorgeous vegetable plate with fresh figs, fried cheese, local pistachios, and cholla buds—the flowering bud of a cholla cactus that resembles a large asparagus tip and a delicacy due to the labor required to harvest it from the spiny cholla cacti bush. Soon tepary beans with queso fresco and fresh green chiltepín peppers follow. Next, beef and chicken tamales and another vegetable platter of locally foraged wild mushrooms, jackfruit ropa vieja, huitlacoche, and salad on a wide wheat tortilla. It's overwhelming, and decadent, and a rich reflection of Garcia's energy, vision, and affection for the landscape and the foodways that she knows best.

A TOAST TO THE DESERT

The intense Sonoran heat requires constant hydration. But it's not just water that you crave. Surrounded by those long stretches of dust and cacti, the city of Tucson certainly feels like an oasis. The cool, dark interior of a bar provides a much-needed respite in the summer months, a place to relax and imbibe, to connect with friends or chat with a jovial bartender. Visit Tucson for the landscape and food, yes, but one of the most understated elements of Tucsonan culture is the nature of its people. Folks are warm and welcoming—what we call buena gente, or good people, in Spanish. The locals I encounter have never met a stranger and are genuinely curious and ready to give you their take on the best of whatever you're looking for. This dedication to both promoting Tucson's charm and attractions while insisting that the city's culture not get diluted by growing populations of newcomers relocating there from across the country is in their DNA. Tucson is the borderlands, and the people here are long accustomed to roaming travelers stopping through.

As a result, Tucson has a great drinking scene. From dives to martini bars, you can find refreshment at any level, and to complement the abundance of Mexican cuisine, there's a bounty of tequila, mezcal, and other spirits distilled from agave and similar plants. The Sonoran desert has a long tradition of moonshine agave spirit production predating Prohibition. Mezcal, like Champagne, has rules (controversial of late) in terms of provenance and production, but agave-based spirits have been produced across this desert region for generations. And in the nearby Chiricahua Mountains, a conservation effort to protect bats and pollinators that relied on overharvested native agave plants led to an international coalition to preserve heritage agave spirits. "Mezcal is not a fad. It is patrimony," Gary Nabhan writes in his award-winning book *Agave Spirits,* which he coauthored with expert David Suro Piñera.

Next to tequila, mezcal is the best known and most popular of the agave spirits, which are among the fastest-growing alcohol markets on earth. In the US the Gen Z generation has made clear they wish to consume less than their predecessors, but they are the key drivers of mezcal's growing popularity, in part because of an affinity for craft distillation culture. Although mezcal is more often associated with Oaxaca, it's just one of many small-batch spirits with similar provenance. It's produced with intention and a remarkable spectrum of flavor profiles ranging from savory and peaty to bright and almost creamy with notes of banana or vanilla. In addition to tequila and mezcal, there's also raicilla and sotol, but most notable for the Tucson area is Sonoran bacanora. Typically, a bacanora has a lighter flavor profile than mezcal. It's a little sweet and grassy with a milder smoke point.

Doug Smith is among the leading local experts on mezcal. He's an Arizona native and cultural anthropologist and came to mezcal through a broader interest in Mexico, coffee, and collective small-production models. He and his wife, Amy, run Bar Crisol—the only dedicated mezcal bar in town. It shares space with their celebrated coffee shop Exo Roast Co. in a small adobe building on land that was once a corral in Barrio Viejo, one of Tucson's oldest neighborhoods. Today it is also a music venue and serves bar snacks like tamales prepared by a local abuela.

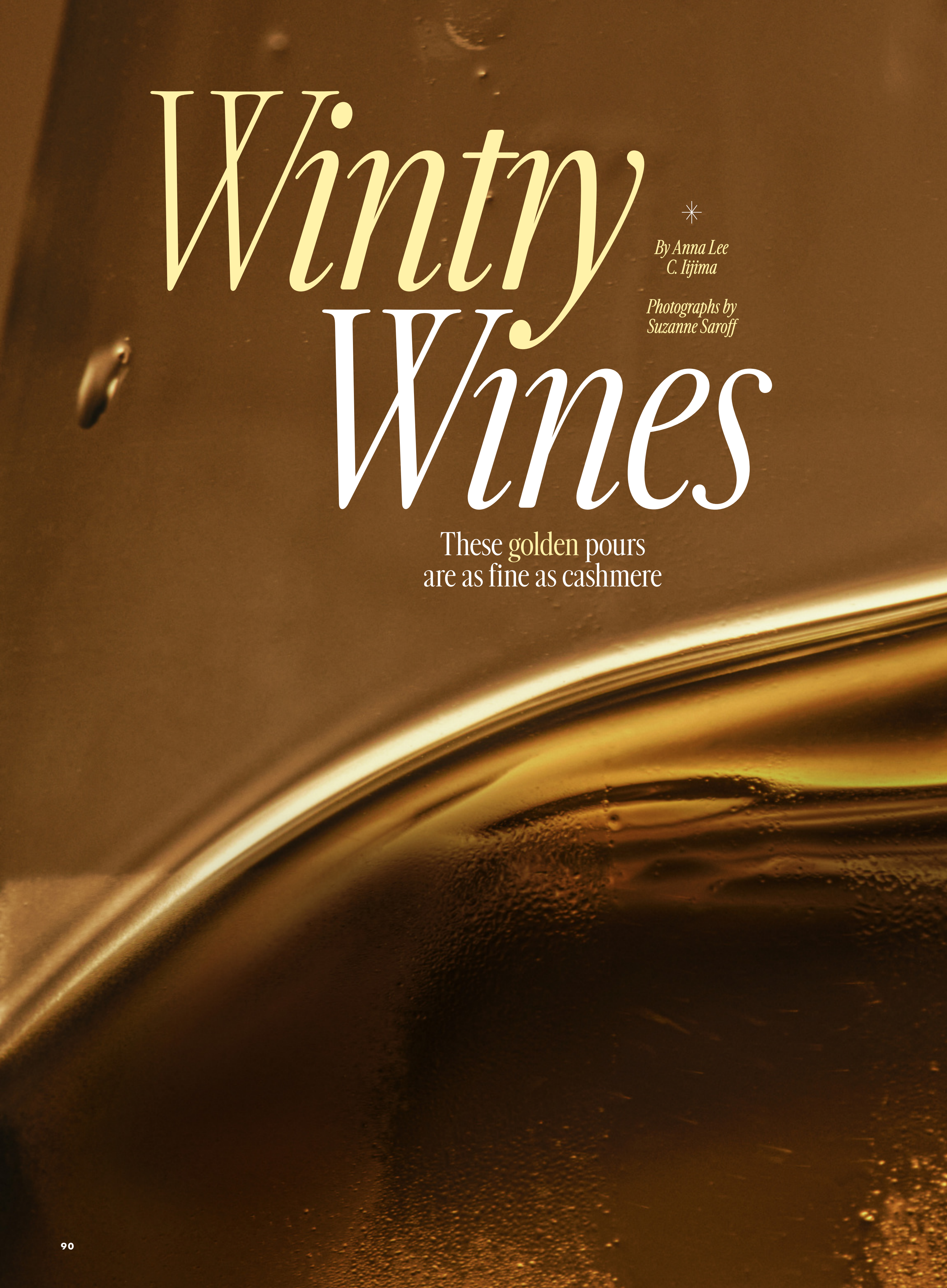
FLOR DEL DESIERTO
FLOR DEL DESIERTO
RANCHO TEPÜA PALMILLA
LOS CANTILES 1905
LOS CANTILES 1905
LOS CANTILES 1905
LOS CANTILES 1905
LOS CANTILES 1905
MAZOT
BACANORA MAZOT
RANCHO TEPÜA BACANORA
BAIUQ
1915 BACANORA
LA VENENOSA
LA VENENOSA
LA VENENOSA
MEZONTE
MEZONTE

Smith is not a bartender; he's an educator. He offers courses and monthly mezcal tastings at Crisol, and on my visit I spent an evening with him tasting mezcals from across Mexico. Each bottle has a story, starting with a bacanora from just across the border wall in Sonora, then a mezcal from Puebla made with an old practice called bovine fermentation in which the spirit ferments inside a bag made from cowhide, and another from Oaxaca in a style called pechuga—named for the process of putting a raw chicken or turkey breast inside the still to impart certain flavors and balance. With mezcal, no two bottles, even from the same distiller, are exactly the same. And each bottle carries a discernible terroir—you can taste distinct styles and regions in every glass. Depending on the spirit, the agave plant's maturation ranges from five to eight years. And unlike other fine spirits in this price range, for the cultures that produce them, agave spirits aren't meant to be collected. "We don't do that," Smith recalls a producer telling him. They're meant to be enjoyed as soon as they're ready and shared widely to the last drop.

Beyond Crisol, I find agave spirits at every restaurant and bar I visit. The drinks list at Tito & Pep includes at least 30 different mezcals, and Penca is a pioneer in bringing small-batch agave spirits to the area. One of my favorite spots, The Owls Club—located inside a dark, roomy former funeral home—has a number of signature cocktails featuring mezcal and sotol, each with a unique flavor profile and presentation. And on a particularly memorable evening at Saguaro Corners on the outskirts of town, I enjoy a jalapeño margarita looking out at the edge of the Saguaro National Park, spotting a bevy of quail with cartoonish teardrop feathers sprouting from their foreheads, and a couple of javelinas—the beloved pig-looking native hoofed mammals who love prickly pear. These drinks feel like the final bridge to the landscape, that last suspiro, or sigh, at the end of a long hot day, evocative and inextricable from their surroundings.

Poet Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, "To survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras, be a crossroads." Tucson embodies this idea, intersections and the spaces in between. The frontier brings adventure, and in this wonderful Arizona town you can taste potential and excitement. I leave this visit to Tucson as I do every other: inspired by the uniquely local, tough-yet-artful, resilient spirit of the place and in love with the roasty palate it evokes. The list of places to visit and people to meet grows ever longer, the pull of the Sonoran expanse confounding my oceanic island origins. But if the desert is the future, then perhaps my love affair with the desert is a part of my future, of my mind and body preparing to feel the sublime amid austerity. ◆

OPPOSITE: THE WIDE-RANGING MEZCAL LIBRARY AT BAR CRISOL.
BELOW: A LATE-SEASON AGAVE PLANT IN FULL BLOOM.



Wintry Wines

By Anna Lee C. Iijima

Photographs by Suzanne Saroff

These golden pours are as fine as cashmere

During the halcyon days of sun-soaked spring and summer, wines like zesty Sancerre or easy-drinking Pinot Grigio feel as effortless and familiar as the "girl [or boy] next door," says Eun Hee Kwon, sommelier at Saga in Manhattan.

But as the air chills, veering into raw and rude, winter begs for something altogether more comforting. Red wine may seem the obvious choice, but consider embracing white wine's moodier alter ego. Think brooding, nostalgic wines with an unwillingness to fade away quietly — bottles with gravitas, texture and complexity. Enter the heady, untamed sensuality of Condrieu, or the dreamy marzipan and melted-candle textures of Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc.

These wines operate on the opposite flavor spectrum as their zippy counterparts. Frost-bitten nights call for savory wines rich with salinity and nuttiness, languid whites that envelop and persist. These wines deliver a kiss of caramelized char and torrefaction, or march to the staccato brace of tannins and time.

Save your palate-cleansing sips of Champagne or Chablis for raw oysters. Surrender instead to wines that tango with oysters gratinéed with butter and garlic. Till warmer days return, let these wintry whites guide you to the comforts of the winter hearth: a burnt edge of lamb, singed with sage and ash; the lactic sweetness of melted cheese; or the earthiness of roasted root vegetables.

Food styling by
Maggie Ruggiero

Prop styling by
Linden Elstran

A.A. Badenhorst Secateurs Swartland Chenin Blanc, $20

Sourced from old vines (predominantly over 35 years old) and fermented with indigenous yeast, this is a concentrated wine with presence and persistence. A fantastic introduction to South African white wines.

Secateurs
VINTAGE WHITE WINE
2024
BADENHORST FAMILY WINES
SWARTLANDSE W.O. STEEN
CHENIN BLANC
750 ml

Muga Rioja Blanco, $19

White Rioja is where power meets poise. Typically a blend of Viura, Garnacha Blanca, and Malvasía grapes, Muga's full-bodied Rioja Blanco is an affordably priced benchmark, perfumed sweetly with notes of chamomile, hazelnuts, and herbs but also the spice and smoke of French oak.

2024
Muga
RIOJA

Yves Cuilleron La Petite Côte Condrieu, $62

Condrieu, in the northern Rhône, is the ancestral home of the Viognier grape. Flamboyant, undulating, and sensual, Condrieu is heady with blossoms and apricots ripe to the point of bruising. Viscous, even oily in texture, but with an earthy sauvage and an amaretto grip of tannins.

CUILLERON
CONDRIEU
2023
La Petite Côte
Yves Cuilleron à Chavanay

Domaine de la Janasse Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, $70

Châteauneuf-du-Pape in the southern Rhône is better known for its reds, but the white wines, typically blends of Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, and Clairette, are deeply historic too. Sun-drenched and laden with wax and spice, the wine's fruit and floral tones shift over time to savory expressions of earth, leather, and mushroom.

Contrôlé
DOMAINE DE LA JANASSE
2021
CHÂTEAUNEUF DU PAPE

Joh. Jos. Prüm Wehlener Sonnenuhr Auslese, $80

Mosel Rieslings deliver a masterful interplay of acidity, sweetness, and savoriness. The subtle honeyed note of an Auslese, or late-harvest Riesling, can lend contrast to even the most robust and full-flavored of winter fare, fatty meats like pork chops, or Asian soups rich with umami and soy sauce, Kwon says.

Joh. Jos. Prüm
2023
Wehlener Sonnenuhr
Auslese

Joseph Dorbon Vin Jaune, $105

Vin Jaune is the signature dry white of the Jura region of France made from the Savagnin grape. Long maturation sous voile, or under a veil of yeast, gives Vin Jaune a salty, earthen complexity, bold spice, and texture that's satiny, even unctuous—perfect for rich soups and stews.

2012
Vin Jaune
Arbois
Joseph DORBON

COS Pithos Bianco, $35

Pithos refers to the clay amphora used to ferment and age this supple, spicy, orange-style wine. Made from white Grecanico grapes macerated with their skins, its orange-peel and chamomile flavors are rimmed with delicate tannins. A benchmark of Sicilian natural winemaking.

Sergio Zenato Lugana Riserva, $47

Trebbiano di Lugana, known also as Turbiana, is a rare Italian grape native to Lugana on the southern shores of Lake Garda. When barrel-fermented and aged at least two years, it becomes a riserva, a grande dame of a wine, luscious with frangipane and hints of baked apple and ginger. A profound, weighty white, it would meld gorgeously with dishes like braised rabbit or a turbot in a béarnaise sauce.

Lugana
Riserva
2021
ZENATO

Tasting Notes

Need some pointers on speaking with a somm? Start here.

Structure

Intensity of flavor, richness of body, acidity, and tannins are all building blocks that lend structure to wine. Wines with more structure feel more present or persistent on the palate.

Minerality

From glimmers of crushed salt to notes of clay and gravel, minerality takes wine beyond the immediacy of fresh fruit and flowers, grounding it in a complexity that can taste savory to saline.

Texture

A wine's texture can range from coarse with tannins (think weighty velvet or the roughness of a cat's tongue) to as smooth and rich as olive oil. Texture amplifies the presence, weight, and substance of wine.

Maturation

Time in barrel or bottle adds dimension, texture, and flavor complexity to wine, making it richer, rounder, and more harmoniously integrated. Oak barrels especially lend characteristic spice, smoke, and nuttiness.

Sweetness

Residual sugar tends to get a bad rap, in part due to cloying mass-produced bottles. But don't dismiss sweetness outright. Handled with finesse, sweetness in wine isn't sugary, but rather a perception of fruitiness, richness, or texture.

NEW!
Bon Appétit has a wine shop!
Visit *bonappetitwineshop.com* for more expert recommendations.

Grape Expectations

Grenache Blanc

An ample, full-bodied white that along with Roussanne personifies the power and lusciousness of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and other Rhône white blends, but also the Spanish white Rioja.

Marsanne

The broad-shouldered, golden icon of Hermitage in the northern Rhône. Produces a profoundly aromatic wine that gains a honeyed glaze and smoky, coffee-bean torrefaction with age.

Viognier

Beyond the northern Rhône, this luscious perfumed white thrives in Australia, Virginia, and California. Louisa Rose, head of sustainability at Yalumba, the pioneering Australian winery, describes Viognier as "a white wine for red wine lovers."

Savagnin

The dominant white grape of the Jura that, beyond Vin Jaune,is often blended into Chardonnay and bottled as L'Étoile or Côtes du Jura. Characteristically smoky, nutty wines with baked apple and pear flavors dusted with notes of salt and white pepper.

Riesling

While best recognized for its racier, linear expressions, riper, semisweet Auslese or full-bodied dry styles can highlight Riesling's more complex, textural, and savory forms. Iconic to Germany, but look to Austria, France, the US, and Australia too.

Chenin Blanc

In dry, fuller-bodied forms, Chenin takes on a structure that's rich and rugged—think Savennières and Chinon in the Loire Valley. Fleshy and ruffled with charred herbs, they're complex wines that coat the palate with a rippling, waxy haze.

Pinot Gris

Pinot Grigio's spicier, more commanding sibling. It's the same grape but with more intense fruit, bolder tannins, and a lush texture.

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Whether you carefully eat one side at a time or down the whole cookie in one bite, these Peppermint Black-and-White Cookies, p. 62, are out-of-this-world good.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TRAVIS RAINEY.
FOOD STYLING BY MICAH MORTON. PROP STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA.

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g. Copies not Distributed	40,492	59,352
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i. Percent Paid	88.59%	88.79%
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k. Total Paid Print Copies (line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies	698,036	534,101
l. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies	764,054	576,284
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7. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.
(Signed) John Almash, Global Consumer Revenue Executive Director

Last Call

A little something to sip on from Epicurious's vast archives

FIRE CIDER TONIC

RECIPE BY LUKAS VOLGER
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHELSEA KYLE

It's fitting that Fire Cider sounds vaguely mystical because this restorative chameleon transforms into an immunity booster, a mocktail, a marinade, and a salad dressing. This version by cookbook author Lukas Volger is a take on the original formula created by herbalist Rosemary Gladstar and her students at the California School of Herbal Studies in the 1980s. Gladstar's recipe was inspired by older remedies like Four Thieves Vinegar, which, according to legend, prevented four grave robbers from contracting bubonic plague.

Volger's modern version uses turmeric, rosemary, ginger, and apple cider vinegar to create a powerful elixir purported to ward off cold-weather sniffles. Tamed with a bit of honey, Fire Cider is as much a zippy stand-in for apple cider vinegar in salad dressings as a mixer for quick mocktails made with sparkling water and a squeeze of orange juice. In keeping with its healing roots, combine it with hot water and lemon juice for a warming Fire Cider Tea. —*Sam Stone*

Place **1 small onion, coarsely chopped**, **8 large garlic cloves, smashed**, **4 sprigs rosemary**, **1 whole clove**, **4-oz. piece horseradish, peeled, coarsely grated (about 1 cup)**, **3-oz. piece ginger, peeled, coarsely grated (about ½ cup)**, **1 Tbsp. ground turmeric**, and **1 tsp. black peppercorns** in a 1-qt. glass jar with a lid. Crumble **1–2 dried red chiles** (depending on your heat preference) into jar. Squeeze in juice from **1 lemon, quartered**; add spent lemon to jar. Pour in **2 cups unfiltered apple cider vinegar**. (Solids should be submerged; add more vinegar if needed.) Seal jar; swirl mixture gently to combine. Chill 1 month (don't worry if garlic turns blue; it's harmless).

Strain fire cider through a cheesecloth-lined mesh sieve into a large measuring glass; discard solids, then squeeze cheesecloth over glass to extract as much liquid as possible (wear gloves if you wish to avoid staining your hands with the turmeric). Rinse out jar and pour fire cider back in. Stir in **2 Tbsp. honey**; seal jar and shake to dissolve honey. Taste fire cider and add more honey if desired.

To make tonic, pour **seltzer** into an ice-filled rocks glass. Add 1 Tbsp. fire cider and a squeeze of juice from **1 orange quarter**. Garnish with a **rosemary sprig**.

DO AHEAD: Fire cider can be made 3 months ahead. Cover and chill.

Makes about 2 cups

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FOOD STYLING BY ALI NARDI

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